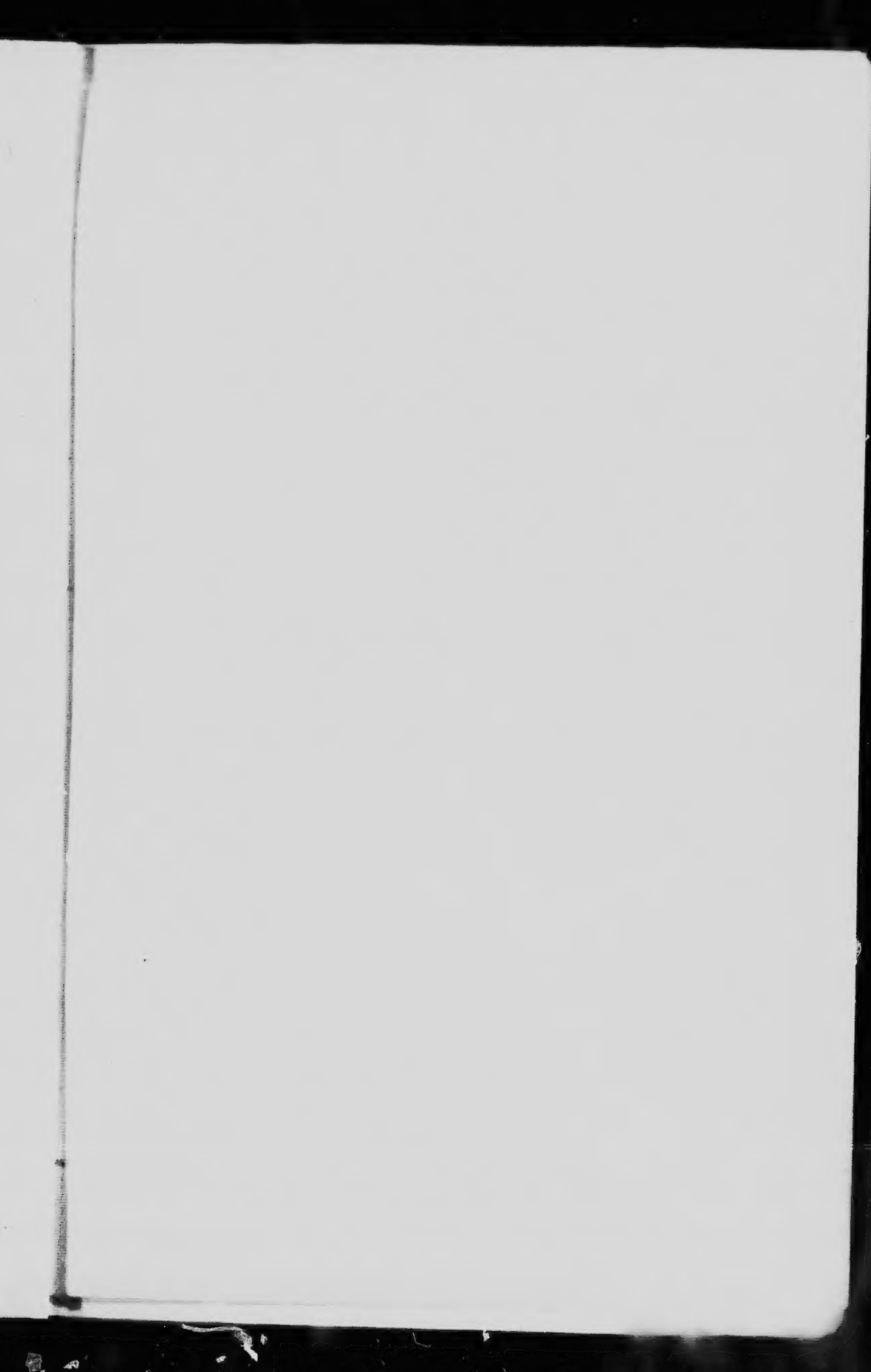
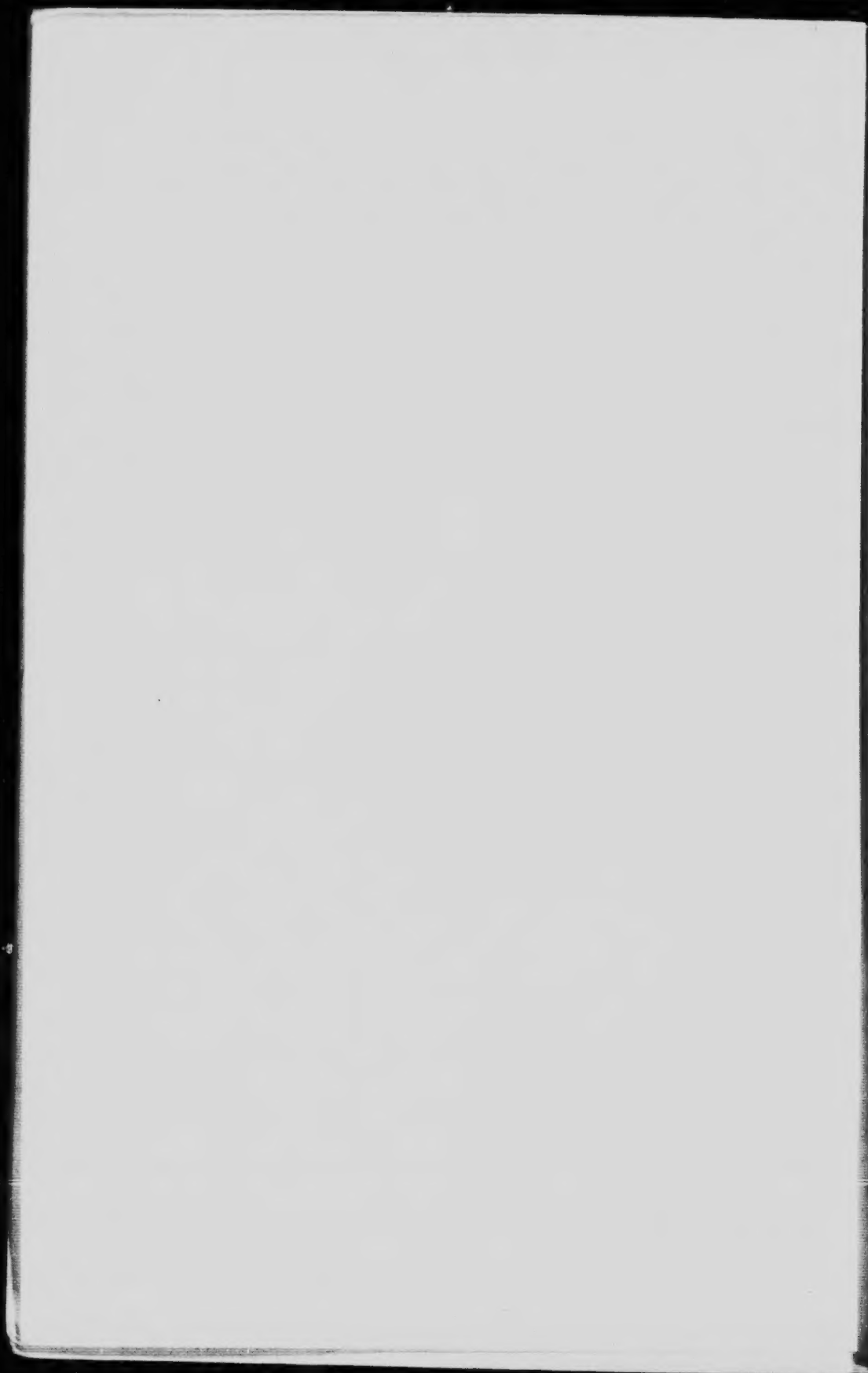


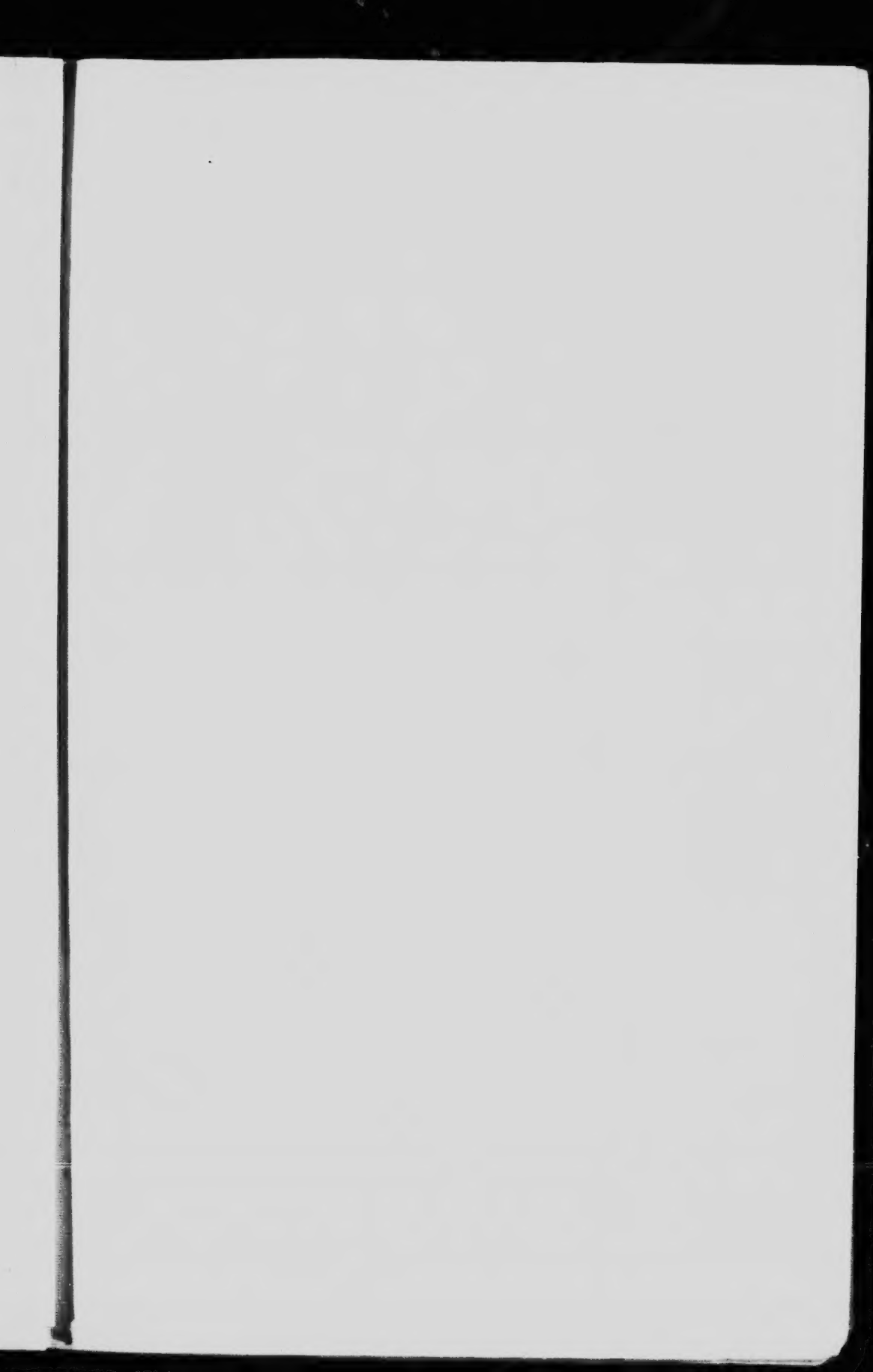
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THE DRUMMER OF THE DAWN







IN MEMORY
OF
DEAR DICK

THE DRUMMER OF THE DAWN

BY
RAYMOND PATON

TORONTO
THE MUSSON BOOK COMPANY
LIMITED

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BOOK I
EARLY DAYS

I, ROBERT APING-AYRES, some time known as Roberto or Robbie, have left to wiser and maybe more careful hands than my own the chronicling of the little life lent to me from God to take care of for awhile before He took it again unto Himself. When whimsically I christened you "Tinwhumpinny" I little dreamed that the sound of the drum you would beat would recall me from the path down which I was fast drifting I know not whither. If I have failed in remembering your sayings and doings it is only because they cannot be chronicled. If I have stumbled and faltered in showing the depth and purity of the childish love which saved in time a wasted life which the locusts were eating, it is only because that love is above all price, beyond all power to describe.

But in the words I remember so well, I live for the time when before one of the jewelled Gates of Heaven he will beat his drum to guide me in also, and I shall bring the bouquet of wild flowers he bade me gather for him, with the words, "See what I've brought you." And maybe they will become immortal flowers to bloom beside us in the Garden of the Kingdom of Heaven for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER I

A STUDY IN BLUE AND GOLD WITH ONE BLACK SPECK

VIEWS in the deep evening light as a miniature panorama, the waves of the bay might have been carved, so far as their colour scheme was concerned, in pure lapis lazuli, the stretches of sand on the foreshore terminating in hillocks and sand dunes of burnt golden brown grass, might have been skilfully cut out of pure topaz quartz. Around this spot of the universe, Nature seemed to have used her every artifice to produce a wondrous brilliant jewelled effect. It almost seemed as if a Monte Cristo grotto had suddenly flung wide the doors of its treasure cave and had said to the Great Sculptor, "Behold ! fashion in all the great coloured jewels of the earth what shapes you please !" Then well pleased with such modelling, Dame Nature rested and smiled behind the great sunset bars of molten marigold stretched across the sky. Smiled when she saw that the waves were the colour of lapis lazuli : reflected when the shallow sea pools which the tide had left became deep blue gray : approved when the last colour echo centred around a bungalow set far back on the foreshore, the base of which appeared from a distance to be on fire, since it was surrounded by thousands of marigolds catching and flinging back all the bright gold shining from such portion of the Kingdom of Heaven as was visible to the naked eye. Liquid flames of marigolds everywhere ; each burning to catch the last sun rays before their curious little stubby finger petals folded over their heart centres for the night.

Other things of everyday life are not lacking from the picture of blue and gold. Far out in the shallow waters two

blue-jerseyed fishermen ply their gold brown prawning nets. A patched golden sail flutters out from the distant dipping mast of a belated fishing smack, whilst outside the farthest clump of gray-blue slated fishers' cottages, a homely clothes line sways in the breeze bearing evidence beyond dispute that the small blue shirts belonging to the juvenile population are indisputably washed and hung out to dry upon occasions.

Nature invariably has a hidden orchestra to play behind the scenes of her best effects, but the intense silence reigning upon the present occasion seemed to indicate that the orchestra had not arrived, unless the low 'cello note of a bumble bee moving in and out of a purple clover patch, and the piccolo-like trill of a lark, who had arisen from his abiding place beneath a clump of sea thistles, could in any way indicate a preliminary tuning up; to say nothing of stretching one's imagination just a little further, and believing that the tinkle of the pebbles washed back by the little waves, might verily be the idle turning of tambourines.

However satisfactory a panoramic view may be for the sight, constituted as humanity is, a microscopic view at times becomes necessary for the senses.

Humanity in the main is rather little, so that it is apt to think in details, analyze in sections, and dabble in particulars. An intimate sense of sight and touch usually begets a desire for possession. When both these senses have become more or less blunted, Wisdom by way of being justified of her children usually offers the cynical suggestion that possession is not everything, and peace without covetousness is perhaps best in the long run. Allowing for an instant that old Dame Nature is peeping behind the bars of gold in the sky and pronouncing her verdict that everything is good, hers are not the only eyes that are taking in the evening picture.

From an upper window of the half bungalow house upon the headland, a nice looking woman about thirty years of age, looks out of the window framed in the wild honeysuckle, wild jessamine and clematis, which smothers the house.

Her bright eyes smile as they rest upon the figure of a child who is standing half up to his brown knees amongst the big crescent beds of marigolds looking out to sea.

It is a curious wistful little face, which the woman looks at, united to a wonderfully sturdy little body.

Martha Cray opened the shell box upon the dressing-table and leisurely hunted for a hair-pin, in order better to fix the ridiculous white crochet mat which worn upon the head usually denotes servitude in English families.

"Wish I 'ad the bringing up of 'im," grunted Martha. "Poor lamb, as darling a thing as ever walked this earth. And as for 'is white-faced religious 'ippocrite mother, Ugh!" Martha dug the hair-pin in her bright black hair as savagely as if the unoffending hair-pin had been a stiletto, and its destination the body of her mistress.

"And 'is sister," continued Martha, "twelve years older than 'e is, bless 'im. Might well call 'er Mealie indeed, Mealie of face, Mealie with her sneaking manner and ways, and Mealie of mind too, Ugh! An' 'im a-shunted about from pillar to post, and no one wanting 'im, bless 'im. She oughtn't to 'ave no young child she oughtn't, a-sending 'im to 'er titled sisters," continued Martha in soliloquy, "and me with 'im, among a lot of 'eathens: that's just what they were, 'eathens. I shan't never forget that visit. They wasn't fit to 'ave no child, specially a child with a mind like 'is. Ugh—Bohemians, that's wot they was, Bohemians indeed, Buddhists that's wot they was, a-teaching 'im things about religion I never taught 'im, a-keeping of 'im up out of 'is bed, night after night, whilst men with long 'air played violins and pianos. Celebrities they called 'em, and some of 'em only fit for asylums, 'ang me if they wasn't. Not but wot," added Martha truthfully, "some of them played and sang and talked wonderful. But no place for a child, an' 'im," declaimed Martha, waving a hand-glass dramatically in the region of her back hair, "'im a-drinking of it all in, and a-talking to 'em in their own lingo, as if 'is dear 'ead wasn't full of the oddest ideas as it is. Good Lord, why I 'ardly know 'ow to answer some of the things 'e says to me as it is, without them a-filling 'is mind full of 'eathen ideas about God and music an' art, and fal-lals an' fings wot no respectable child ought to know anything about at 'is age, and 'ere 'e's full of 'em. Not but what 'es a boy every inch of 'im, an' a little gentleman," wound up Martha proudly. "'e can

'old 'is own wiv any of the fisher boys here a-playing 'ockey on the sands, or runnin' or swimmin', and that's wot I see 'e does these days as I 'ave care of 'im, but when 'is cat of a mother comes 'ome she'll stop it soon enough."

Martha paused in her oration, caused by the act of kneeling to dive in the recesses of a big tin box for a fresh print blouse, with which she commenced to encase the upper portion of her neat but portly form. This portion of her toilet being satisfactorily performed Martha returned to her grievances.

"I do say it ain't no manner of upbringing for a child. First one tutor, then another tutor, then stray visits to London among that 'eathen lot. And out of the 'ole lot of them cranks and Bohemi: people, the best of the 'ole lot was the gentteman who gave 'im that 'eathen nickname 'Tinwhumpinny.' Tinwh: pinny, indeed, an' 'im christened Philip out of the Gospe.. Or perhaps the foreign German gent who wanted to give 'arf a sovereign and a bit of advice. I won't take the 'arf sovereign, I ses, I can do my dooty to little Master Philip I ses, without that, but I will 'ear wot yer advice is, I ses. 'Well,' 'e ses, an' he seemed in earnest over it, 'you have a curious little plant there,' 'e ses, a-pointing over to where Master Philip was a-listening to a lot of 'em talking nineteen to the dozen, one against another. 'The world calls it genius,' though what he meant by that is more than I know, mused Martha. 'Well,' ses 'e, 'curious plants like that don't want a hot-house, neither do they require an ice-field to grow to perfection in.'

"'Well what of it?' ses I.

"'This,' ses 'e, 'is the 'ot-house. His home is the ice-field apparently.' 'Well,' ses I again, 'wot am I to do with it?' Then 'e just smiles at me in an aggravating way, and ses: 'Oh, you cor' I do a good deal. Don't let 'im 'ave too much of either,' and I ain't certain that wot 'e ses isn't right. But the icebergs are coming home safe enough," concluded Martha, "coming 'ome to-morrow. A-giving orders all day long, Ugh! An' 'is mother wiv 'er white face, and 'er fits of temper and excitement, an' never looks yer straight in the face, always so careful of 'er dressing bag beside 'er bed, or in 'er 'and,

sometimes I think she has something in that locked bag, she don't want nobody to see, and if I wasn't a Christian I should be inclined to think at times she——"

What further remarks Martha might have had to offer will never be known ; for at that moment there was a child's cry of real terror, which came distinctly to the window from the garden below. The cry consisted of an agonized repetition of her own name—"Martha! Martha!" and Martha waited for nothing, but flew downstairs.

The exceedingly beautiful colours of the landscape and the sunset had made their full impression upon the child in the garden.

Far too sensitive, far too poetical and dreamy for a child, little Philip, left too much alone, supplied the lack of companionship by thoughts, drank in the sense of everything that was beautiful as a thirsty lonely traveller in the desert might drink water.

What he was thinking about was the name of the great artist who had painted just such pictures as the one he saw before him. His Aunt, Lady Argaffel, a lady whom Martha had recently included among the heathen they had visited, had two hanging in her studio. Whistler, yes, that was his name. How Whistler would have loved such a picture! And then the curious loom of the curious little mind was weaving words that seemed to express it. Somebody had written "Blue and Gold for the King's own Daughter," and perhaps "Blue and Gold for the King's own Son" as well—that is if the King had a son—and again provided the son appreciated anything so beautiful. Perhaps, though, Kings' sons did not care for the same things that he, Philip, cared for. So the thoughts of the child droned on, as drowsily as the late bee who was buzzing in and out of the honeysuckle and setting a-swinging like an evening bell-ringer the slender white lilies as he touched them. And whilst Philip gradually fell asleep among the flowers, a black speck appeared upon the far sand dunes past the fisher cottages. The one spot out of harmony with the rest of the picture. Seen by the eye alone, the advancing object looked somewhat like an animated scarecrow. As the apparition advanced over the patches of yellow sand, it gradually resolved

itself into the form of a very tall, gaunt man, with straggly legs.

The remains of a filthy tattered frock coat were carried by the sea breeze in ragged streamers behind him, a pair of tight and equally tattered trousers, held up by some unknown process, hung about his long gaunt legs; a greasy top hat with the beaver brushed the wrong way, was tilted at a curious angle at the back of a head composed of even more greasy black and grey ringlets which had worn a greasy circle upon the coat flapping around the collarless neck. Over one of the man's high bony shoulders hung a dirty sack.

So this figure straggled towards the house in strides to which was added an habitual stealth. Every step he took brought the man nearer the unconscious Philip as he dozed beside the flower beds.

As the tattered man drew nearer, his aspect became more and more repulsive. An evil life had left its mark upon him; a hideous disease served further to disfigure his face, could such a thing have been possible. He looked as Naaman or Herod might have looked had either of them been a beggar. Through all the filthy gutters of life this man must have squirmed and remained unashamed, or he could never have come out in the light. The evening hour was that when deep twilight gathers fast, so maybe he had crept out like the bats, whom he might have resembled, had not his horrible personality so strongly suggested the vulture.

Hitherto the only evening sounds had been the aforementioned piccolo trill of the lark, and the dull drone of the bees. As the man reached the wicket gate of the bungalow house, the sweet stillness was broken by a horrible croak. The deep tones of an almost sepulchral bass voice, set one's very nerves jarring. The voice, like the man, was loathsome, as it half sang, half groaned—"Bones, Bones or Bottles. Ole clothes. Bones." Then pausing upon a jarring deeper note the voice repeated, "Ole Clothes."

Philip awoke from amidst the atmosphere of the droning bees and the scented flowers with a start. The spiritual senses of a child are very acute where good and evil are concerned, and Philip of all children was spiritual.

One noticed this particularly in his eyes, which in that sudden moment of awakening were wide with horror, with an unspeakable terror. Perhaps the first feeling of fear the boy had ever known was showing itself all too plainly upon his face.

Philip coiled amongst the speckled flowers, and his speckled tweed suit had for a moment escaped the tattered man's observation, and it may be at once stated that very little escaped the sight of the vagrant's big wonderful eyes, which were of the gipsy order, large, black, unfathomable, almost mesmeric in their effect; eyes that would have made any other face wonderful, but which in their present corrupted and diseased setting only became basilisk-like and helped to intensify the repulsiveness of his face.

In the first glance the man had given to the bungalow house, he had noticed through one of the French windows upon the verandah, a handsome dressing bag. It stood upon an elegant dressing-table with its draperies of ribbons and sprigged muslin.

The dressing bag was one which had evidently once been in use, now discarded, or not constantly used. Half of it was carelessly opened, and although several of the glittering stoppered bottles were visible, it could be seen that others had been smashed and had apparently remained empty for years.

As the tramp's eyes lighted upon the dressing bag a curious expression came into his face; the sort of look which as a rule records the recollection of something one has long forgotten. The look passed over the creature's face in a flash and was gone.

Then the man saw the child.

"Master?" droned the man, enquiringly. "Young Master."

Philip rose to his feet, he looked the man squarely in the face. As the man met the boy's gaze he started slightly, just a quiver as if he had received a faint thrill transmitted by means of electricity.

"Any bones, old clothes, got any old clothes here, Master?"

"Go away," said Philip.

"Why?" leered the man.

"Because," said little Philip, "you poison the very flowers."

For a second the man seemed to be intently struck with the tones of the voice, to be listening to the words, as if he had heard the selfsame words before. Then he moved forward, and without a word he turned Philip's face towards him with his claw-like hands. Philip tried to fling off the claw-like dirty fingers that had touched him with all his childish strength. The man remained peering down, his face towards Philip's. The very atmosphere seemed tainted with frowsiness and the after-fumes of cheap brandy—whilst a sort of evil mocking triumph lit up his face.

It was then that Philip's agonized scream brought the worthy Martha flying downstairs.

The man shuffled back a few steps.

Philip flung himself towards Martha's arms and grasping her hands imploringly said—

"Martha, Martha, send the beastly thing away."

"Go away at once," ordered Martha. "How dare you come here frightening him with your ugly face!" demanded Martha with rising temper. "We don't want no dirty tramps 'ere, and don't you never come again."

"Bones," grumbled the man, "Bones."

"I'll give you bones if you don't clear off," shouted the indignant Martha.

Without hesitating any longer, "Ole clothes" turned and departed across the sands in the direction in which he had come.

"Don't take on, dearie," said Martha coaxingly. "Why, Master Philip, I ain't never seen you frightened by anything before. I wonder what it could have been."

Long, long after "Old clothes" had shuffled into the twilight of the night out of view over the sands, long after even the last flutter of the ragged tail coat had disappeared in a speck over the sky line, Philip still stood and clasped Martha's hands convulsively and refused to be comforted.

The scent of the evening flowers seemed to have become

poisoned for him. The lovely night seemed to have become hideous. Perhaps a premonition of the future, awarded to all of us at strange times and in strange places, had been given to him. Perhaps a vision of the cross which would be his, and the thief who would be always upon one side of it was actually presented to him.

Perhaps Philip dimly understood that lovely dreamless nights may have the power to produce at certain times, and or ever afterwards in life, one awful nightmare.

CHAPTER II

IMMEDIATE ANCESTORS

A FEW remarks concerning Philip's immediate ancestors and family might not be out of place, even if it was only to serve as a brief chronicle by way of showing the position in the world of a child who can only be described as not being wanted by any of the aforementioned relations.

The Earl of Wellminster, who was the eighth Earl of his line, possessed the strange family failing of getting children he did not want.

Possessing Wellminster Castle, together with a revenue and vast estates, all the Earl wished for was a son and heir; consequently Fate saw fit to inflict the Earl with three daughters in succession, much to his disgust.

The three Graces, as he cynically termed his somewhat plain daughters, were respectively named Marian, Blanche, and Janet. These names, chosen without any deference to the wishes of his wife, were in all probability selected by the Earl at random from Debrett as a sort of melancholy echo of former ancestral disappointments.

Rich beyond all ordinary desires, the parsimonious nature of the Earl of Wellminster would, for sheer meanness, have shamed many a beggar.

After many years, during which period the Earl had completely given up any hopes he might have fondly entertained in expectation of a son and heir to inherit his title, estates and wealth, his wife, as if by a superhuman understanding of her husband's sole earthly wish, presented him with a son, before immediately departing to another world.

Pampered amidst every luxury, and especially brought up so that his every fresh selfish wish was only framed, to be immediately gratified, the son and heir of the Earl of Wellminster cannot perhaps be entirely blamed for showing at a very early stage in his career every indication of the unhealthy unpleasant child he was eventually destined to become. The Earl, however, always considered his latest acquisition perfect in every respect, although his nurses, servants and other dependents surrounding him, all held a very different opinion, whilst the gratified vanity of the old man found vent in showering upon his male offspring without stint, the wealth he rigidly denied to his three daughters.

In due course his daughters married, the Earl providing each one in turn with a paltry income, only just sufficient to live upon (which, considering his affluent circumstances, was little short of a disgrace) before cutting the lot, since he considered they had all married beneath them.

Blanche, who was rather a weak brainless woman, married a wealthy sculptor, at whose big house and studio at Chelsea, all the important celebrities of the age regularly gathered, with the exception of the Earl, who never entered the doors.

Janet, the best natured daughter of the three, though the plainest, married an exceedingly wealthy stockbroker, who transferred to her all his undoubtedly valuable stocks and shares, upon his exit to a presumably better world, where he realized instinctively that his indubitably acute business abilities might conceivably be at a premium.

Marian, the eldest, and at one time the least plain of the sisters, had married Edwin Gray, a public singer, who had cleverly contrived to remain a more or less fashionable rage during the years of his married life, which fact alone ought to stand at least to his credit.

What did not stand to his credit, however, in the eyes of his widow, was the fact that ten months after the period when, according to popular superstition prevailing as to the general fitness of occupation, he might conceivably have joined the Heavenly choir under the celestial and able direction of Azrael, she had been left with a posthumous male child as a sort of last legacy.

Having been blessed twelve years previously with one daughter, christened Amelia, the Lady Marian considered the legacy almost immoral.

The last years of the singer's wedded union having been spent, not without excessive provocation upon the part of his wife, in bickerings, wranglings, storms and scenes too innumerable to mention, this last proof of his good will proved in every way too much for the lady's nerves and temper. She accordingly hated her latest offspring without openly showing it; resented it without any outward signs of retaliation. The natural acidity of her temperament found vent in a curious harsh religion, if indeed one could dignify her peculiar doctrine with such a name. The acidity undoubtedly assisted the doctrine, but whether the doctrine retaliated by increasing in any way the acidity is open to conjecture.

Having two wealthy sisters, the Lady Marian Gray found it to be convenient at frequent and divers seasons to transfer the young son she considered her encumbrance, to their respective homes; on which occasions she derived much spiritual consolation of the canting order from the perpetual but syncopantic companionship of her daughter Amelia, or Mealie, and quite successfully continued to forget for awhile the very existence of her other child.

These moments of respite she looked upon as being the happiest of a life, which the Lady Marian always referred to as if she were in reality a mediæval martyr being sustained by the united grace of all the beatitudes, upon the useful completion of which existence she would immediately be assigned a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, which must at once be the envy, not to say reproach of all other mortals competitively successful in being present at the installation.

Had any one informed the Lady Marian that she was the narrowest of hypocrites, the most vicious tempered of self-pandering egoists, the lady would have immediately turned to the Bible, and straightway looked up the passage concerning Liars, not forgetting to dwell with marked preference, not to say complacency, upon the unmistakable directions for their burning in a lake specially composed of sulphur, brimstone and firebrands.

The Lady Marian occasionally looked up these passages in much the same way as an enthusiastic Cook's tourist might refresh a defective memory concerning some of the chief features of the better known lakes.

Neither the Lady Marian nor the Cook's tourist doubted for one moment that each existed.

The very thought would have been rank heresy. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, were indisputably authentic, so was Cook.

Could any sort of spiritualized photograph have been taken to record the Lady Marian's visualization in her own mind, of the Deity, it would without doubt have staggered all existing Creation, to say nothing of sending the lady herself into paroxysms of hysterics as a preparatory measure to her being carried off to an asylum.

There are some persons, and the Lady Marian unquestionably belonged to their number, who, if the Angel Gabriel could be induced to make a special descent and stand in their way for their own benefit and say ever so politely, "You are wrong," would equally politely but firmly retort, even whilst endeavouring to push aside the flaming sword of truth, "Excuse me."

Should they be further pressed for any evidence bearing upon their extraordinary belief in themselves, they would unfalteringly and unerringly disengage a whole mass of texts, ambiguous in themselves and not bearing upon anything in particular, until it is quite reasonable to suppose that the Celestial Visitant in the midst of hopeless mysticism and confusion might resign his special visitation as a hopeless endeavour.

Whereupon the Lady Marian, and all such like her, would smile, and say—"You see, I *am* right. *Truth* is stranger than fiction."

The Lady Janet was only too pleased at all times and all seasons to welcome her nephew little Philip to her comfortably appointed but otherwise lonely home. Perhaps the Lady Janet came nearer to understanding the lonely child better than any one with the exception of Martha. She never, it is true, upon any occasion indulged in any demonstrations of affection towards him whatever. Nevertheless she enjoyed in

a sort of selfish way the child's strange nature and whimsical conversation. She knew in her own mind that he was completely beyond her sphere of comprehension, as she described it, and dimly realized, what none of Philip's other relations appear to have done, that the child was completely alone, and being brought up in an altogether impossible manner.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIBING A TYPICAL EVENING AT THE TOWERS

THE Lady Blanche Argaffel, whose house had been so sweepingly described by the honest and worthy Martha as an abode of Heathen, Buddhists and Bohemians (each of these terms of supreme contempt signifying one and the same thing to poor Martha without that worthy woman having the faintest conception of the meaning of either), welcomed Philip within her doors upon the occasions of his visits to her house, in much the same fashion as she welcomed her husband, Leon Argaffel's older friends, who were all more or less strange products of a strange age. Even in the eclectically artistic and intellectual circles of Chelsea, the Argaffels' big house and studio, The Towers, in Cheyne Row, had long been christened "The Palace of Cranks," and possibly even this description barely did it justice. Every living creature of every higher cult was to be found there at odd times and seasons, and, as it not infrequently happened, all together. At such times and seasons any chance visitor who might have dropped in, not being among the invited, might have formed a : what hasty opinion that he was present at an At Home whose guests were mainly recruited from Bethlehem Hospital, commonly called Bedlam, mingling in happy unison with members of some famous foreign Orchestral Society bringing their instruments with them, further rendered harmonious and complete by sundry additions from the Green Room of several theatres, a portion of the patrons of the Criterion Bar, and last but by no means least many denizens from Montmartre and the Quartier Latin.

Furthermore, as if to make the harmony before referred to more complete from a spiritual aspect, the higher Cults of religion were certainly fully represented by at least two advanced Buddhists, several Christian Scientists, an Arab Prince who claimed to be descended from the Princes of the Desert who were also the Kings of the Sun whoever they might have been, a full fledged Yogi, several Mahommedans, to say nothing of two Church of England Deans, and one English Bishop. The latter reverend gentleman invariably left The Towers under the pleasing impression that he had preached the gospel in every land, and feeling within himself the full satisfaction of having achieved a big missionary effort. Unfortunately, the reverend gentleman did not produce the effect he fondly imagined, for his delivery, at all times most indifferent, and giving the unfortunate impression of plums concealed in the mouth, became in the course of a rapid and intimate conversation almost incoherent.

So it always happened that Lady Blanche Argaffel smiled and nodded vacantly, the Mahommedans listened indifferently and smiled pityingly, and the Christian Scientists grieved secretly.

It must not for one instant be supposed that religion in any of its forms played the leading part in the Argaffel *ménage*. Sculpture, painting, and music, were the chief sister arts who danced a perpetual saraband within The Towers. This was the real worship taking place within the temple; the votive sacrifices of its worshippers could be found in works of painting and sculpture hung around its altars, ranging from the sublime to the ridiculous, which might well have turned many a stronger stomach than that possessed by honest, uneducated Martha, and a ritual rendered extremely complex by reason of being carried on in a jargon whose only historical parallel probably took place among the brother workers during the decorations of the Tower of Babel.

Lady Blanche would welcome little Philip upon long visits to this strange assembly and take no more real notice of him than she would take of any of the other strange creatures who visited her house, she merely contented herself by being weakly thankful that a nephew of hers should be intelligent enough to

be conversed with and noticed so much by everybody. As to expressing any surprise whatever upon the subject of any imaginable conversation which might ever take place, however bizarre, Lady Blanche would as soon have thought of criticizing her husband's taste in sculpture, to which she had grown quite at home as a necessary ingredient of the age, and firmly believed it to be at one and the same time, brilliantly deplorable but necessary, for about Art, of which she talked a very great deal, it must be confessed she actually understood very little.

Upon a particular evening early in June we take a glimpse of Lady Blanche Argaffel holding one of her somewhat mixed At Homes.

The first two people to arrive, accidentally side by side, were the Bishop and the Arab Prince, and the contrast was in every way remarkable. The Arab Prince wore his native dress which was extremely gorgeous and highly coloured, whilst his frizzled hair hung in perfumed bunches; the Bishop in his turn also wore his native dress, which was extremely sober, whilst only a vista of pink skin showed through exceedingly scanty bristles, which were cropped unnecessarily short.

Immediately behind them stalked the giant form of a celebrated painter, who cleverly contrived to impart wherever he went an impressionist picture of John the Baptist walking in later days in the wilderness. The selection of his wardrobe was to say the least of it curious, since he wore sandals and no socks, but partly made up for the deficiency by two huge ear-rings depending from his ears, and swinging beneath his unbrushed tousled curls which must have taken many years to grow.

Immediately behind him advanced, in a slow and cumbrous fashion, what at first appeared to be a pantomime elephant. This effect was caused in the dimly lighted studio by the presence of an enormously fat violoncellist, who despite being arrayed in evening dress, bravely contrived to carry his unwieldy instrument before him in a great black case, the nodding movement of whose thin end sufficed to give the appearance of the hesitating advance of an elephant's trunk.

Three ladies simpered behind this musical Colossus, all of whom were attired in very high art gowns, upon whose persons many severe fillets of dull gold seemed to supply the places of

both buttons and flounces. In the case of one of these ladies indeed the absence of buttons became more remarkable by reason of her low blouse being fastened both back and front by means of fine leathern thongs, strangely suggesting brown bootlaces.

The next entrance was rendered more impressive by reason of a gentleman of Eastern origin, garbed in a kind of burnous, who instead of proceeding to shake hands with his hostess, raised both hands above his turbaned head and forthwith pronounced aloud a short form of benediction towards the direction of the roof.

This personage, who was a famous Yogi, then proceeded in excellent English to further welcome those present.

A straggling group of men, all wearing immense floppy black bows and chattering in both French and English, and who intended to chatter incessantly through the entire evening about painting and sculpture, the two things they understood most about, ranged themselves round in small circles to make way in due course for a gentleman whose cravat, coat, tight trousers and whole costume suggested that he had survived too late from the early days of the *Comedians*, who wound his way beside an excessively fat lady ; *his* mission in life was to write problem plays.

Last but by no means least, a man-servant, who had been kept almost too busily shouting names which he found considerable difficulty in pronouncing, announced Mr. Reginald Chambers and Mr. Robert Aping-Ayres.

These two gentlemen represented in themselves as it were the drama, one being a fairly well-known actor and the other an indisputably well-known critic.

The advance of these two gentlemen was indeed stately. Mr. Reginald Chambers always endeavoured to wave a delicate hand, which was adorned with at least two glittering rings, from side to side in gentle gesticulation. He appeared to be a perpetual preface for himself ; indeed one instinctively missed the presence of ruffles at his wrist to complete the perfect manner peculiar to the beaux of olden days.

Mr. Robert Aping-Ayres was in every way worthy of his companion, for he contrived to impart an impression of great

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majesty to every trivial and ridiculous thing he said, and succeeded despite his slovenly dress and unquestionably dissipated looks to impress his eccentric personality upon everybody with whom he came in contact.

These two personalities, who were great friends, served as an excellent, if grotesque, foil to each other, and had they chanced to be either in the throne room of a Palace or the precincts of a cathedral, would still have continued to pounce like most stately courtiers bantering each other unceasingly and talking incessantly. Could Rosencrantz and Guildenstern have been by any possible chance two really unconscious comedians they would certainly have resembled Reginald Chambers and Robert Aping-Ayres.

Both Reginald Chambers and Robert Aping-Ayres were indeed so punctilious in their observance of stateliness upon all occasions that they invariably insisted upon the Italianizing as it were of each other's Christian names. Thus they always referred to themselves as Reginaldo, and Roberto.

"I have brought Reginaldo," commenced Aping-Ayres, "because I find there is a possibility in him of helping others."

"And I, my dear Lady of Argaffel," observed Reginaldo, with a delicate waving hand poised aloft, "have brought Roberto in order to watch the demoralizing effect of his helping himself."

"Then I'm sure you will both be happy," simpered Lady Blanche.

"Dear Lady of Argaffel," expostulated Reginaldo, "dear Lady, what is happiness—forsooth a bubble. How should I, who am but a lepidopteral hoverer upon misty mountain tops with azure wings like——"

"Icarus," promptly suggested his friend Aping-Ayres. "Icarus who, figuratively speaking, embraced the earth."

"Brave fellow," said Reginaldo. "Tell me, Roberto, have you yourself never embraced the earth?"

"Only as an occasional disciple of Bacchus should embrace it," admitted Roberto in reluctant self-defence.

"Such followers never rise," replied Reginaldo in a tone of great censure. "They never rise, alas, for they are incapable of it."

"I consider you exaggerate," expostulated his friend. "Look at me, why last night was a golden glorious night."

"Hush!" said his friend. "Why think of a riotous night and a famishing morrow?"

"Because," declared Roberto stoutly, "it is my only joy in life; my one solace, albeit my one regret."

"Will you two be quiet?" entreated Lady Blanche. "Signor Sonerez is going to sing."

"Lady Argaffel, how monstrous, how dare he sing when I wish to talk!" proclaimed Mr. Reginald Chambers haughtily, as he glared upon the distant singer in a manner which was intensely comic.

"Surely, Lady Argaffel, you would sooner hear me talk than hear that fellow sing."

"Hush, yes of course."

"Then I shall talk," announced Reginaldo pompously.

The singer had already commenced a *Lieder* and he might have been singing in the street for all the effect his efforts had upon Mr. Reginald Chambers, who continued to discourse loudly.

"Heaven help me," groaned the critic, "he's going to bellow Brahms."

"Why should Heaven especially send succour to you, Roberto?" demanded Reginaldo.

"I only appeal to it as a protection from my creditors,"

"Then your petitions must be even more frequent than mine," grinned Roberto; "I was solely provoked in this instance because all other earthly means appear to fail."

"Not so, brave, honest heart," exclaimed Reginaldo, who was compelled to raise his voice on account of the music, "there are signs that the lady pianist is giving in, she cannot keep up with his pace, she expires with the effort. Alas! poor plodding soul, she picks him up again."

"Hush!" said Lady Blanche.

"Hush!" echoed the Bishop.

"Hush!" commanded Mr. Reginald Chambers, in a louder voice than all as he glared around him.

"Who is the aged pillar of the Church who ventured to

rebuke me," asked Reginaldo, "with the shorn crop of bristles revealing nothing but its own horrid nakedness?"

"Don't know him," replied Aping-Ayres, "but the entirely nude is not in any way immoral."

"Pardon me," interrupted a sculptor who chanced to have overheard the last remark. "In that case you cannot have had the misfortune to see the latest eruption in stone designed by one of your Academicians conspicuously raised in one of your parks, intended to symbolize Peace and Prosperity."

"On the contrary, sir," replied Aping-Ayres, "they were suddenly revealed to me in all their hideousness through the light of a chill dawn whilst my wayward feet were falteringly seeking the shelter of home."

"That must have added to their horror," pursued the sculptor gravely, "for the modelling of their limbs, far from suggesting the fine lines of youth, rather give the impression of two aged Bacchantes romping home after some particularly festive orgy."

"Had they but suggested anything so pleasant to me," replied Aping-Ayres solemnly, "I could have forgiven them and lingered awhile apostrophizing them."

"Indeed," enquired the sculptor. "Why? may I ask?"

"The only great god of all the old hierarchy," whispered Aping-Ayres, "I am one of his most fervent disciples."

"Gentlemen," ventured the lady of the bootlaces, "how is it possible to find anything save the decaying fragments of beauty in any of the statues of London, to say nothing of its architecture? What, I ask you, *can* be done for instance with the Albert Memorial?"

"Done *with* it," demanded Aping-Ayres, as he stared coldly at the lady. "Done *with* it, my dear lady, why there *is* only one thing to do with it. Put it on the top of the Albert Hall."

"I never thought of that," confessed the lady of the bootlaces. "Yet my great faith teaches me—since it may move mountains—that even such a feat would not be impossible. I see it, I feel it," continued the lady as she focussed her eyes vacantly upon space, as if she were in truth actually witnessing

the very passing of the monument to the position suggested for it.

A quiet childish chuckle beside his elbow recalled Aping-Ayres to the fact that a small boy, who had hitherto been silently handing around glasses of wine upon a tray, was offering him the remaining glass with an amusement upon his small face which he made no effort to check.

"Thank you," said Mr. Roberto, as he seized the glass with much eagerness. "I perceive you are an infant of infinite thought. An acolyte within this hospitable temple."

"No," answered Philip, "only a nephew."

"Quite so," answered the unabashed Mr. Roberto: "in that case permit me to drink your good health."

"Truly refreshing and delicious," added Mr. Aping-Ayres, smacking his lips with relish. "I find there is nothing like wine," he said, addressing the child with great solemnity. "I may say it restores all my lost youth." Thereupon the art critic beamed upon Philip as if soliciting confirmation of his belief in the efficiency of the juice of the grape to replenish the ravages that time, nature, and a perpetual self-indulgence had wrought in his system.

Philip nudged his strange companion. "Something strikes me," replied Philip, who was too well bred to talk loudly whilst another was singing.

"Then give it to the world, oh child of wisdom," implored Aping-Ayres. "Is not the mind one great subtle electrical receiver? Are not all thoughts but the electrical currents received and transmitted by it again into the world? You must give to the world again your thought, before some other intelligence receives the vague impression and robs you of the first bloom of its originality. What thought have you generated?"

"Well," answered Philip, hesitatingly, "I was only thinking that you have even greater faith than the Christian Science lady."

"A comparison," said Aping-Ayres, "often shows the presence of original working thought. Why is my faith greater than that of the Christian Science lady?"

"You see," said Philip, "you really believe that the wine you drink will restore your lost youth."

"You think that seems impossible," suggested Aping-Ayres reproachfully.

"It seems miraculous," answered Philip, "but then," he added by way of an afterthought, "wine has nearly always been associated with miracles, has it not?"

Mr. Aping-Ayres coughed. "Is, ahem, is that original?" he asked.

"No," said Philip, innocently, "it was suggested to me by the Bible."

"I think," said Aping-Ayres, after a small pause, during which he appeared to reflect deeply. "I think I shall christen you Tinwhumpinny."

Philip smiled. "Why, what a funny name! What does it mean, Mr. Ayres?"

"To a foreigner, and I regret to add, unenlightened tribe, it signifies a call to arms; it is a sort of native drum if I may so express it," explained Aping-Ayres, improvising blandly as he proceeded.

"Why do I seem to suggest such a funny thing to you?"

"Because," replied Aping-Ayres with a solemnity of conviction worthy of an inspired prophet. . . . "Because I think you are destined to beat a drum, and I am equally convinced, my little friend, that one day all the other natives are going to listen to you."

"It is not the most pleasant among the instruments," said Philip regretfully.

"It is without doubt the one whose sound travels the farthest," replied Aping-Ayres, putting on his most serious manner, "and need I add, the one whose neighbourly sound is most impossible to get away from, or avoid."

Philip shivered slightly. "A sort of public persecution?" he asked wistfully:

"A thing impossible to avoid," reiterated Aping-Ayres, with a sagacious sagging of his head into his slovenly evening collar.

"What is impossible to avoid?" languidly enquired Lady Blanche Argaffel, who possessed a mania for catching the tail end of conversations without ever having heard their context.

"I thought," added the lady sweetly, addressing Aping-Ayres, "that one could avoid anything nowadays if one only possessed sufficient money and the skill to use it to its full advantage at the critical moment."

Without directly replying to Lady Blanche's words of wisdom, Aping-Ayres announced, "Lady Argaffel, I have taken the liberty of re-christening your nephew by the name of Tinwhumpinny."

"How interesting!" purred Lady Blanche. "What does it mean—a chosen vessel?"

"That," rejoined Aping-Ayres, "is perhaps a somewhat free translation, but it will serve. Should the name be found too long it can be shortened to Tinwhumps."

"Very good," agreed Lady Blanche. "I am sure it is a first-class name for him, and if I cannot remember the first I am sure to remember the second, so 'Tinwhumpinny' let it be by all means. Tinwhumpinny, oblige me by beating the Arabian dinner-gong."

"How appropriate, how sweetly suitable!" murmured Aping-Ayres.

"Why?" enquired Lady Blanche languidly.

"Because," announced Aping-Ayres, "with his nature he is doomed to go through life perpetually beating a drum."

"How dreadfully unpleasant!" lisped Lady Blanche, "a sort of combination of the Wandering Jew and a Punch-and-Judy man."

"Madam," retorted Aping-Ayres solemnly, "Punch-and-Judy contains all the early elements of the Drama of Life."

"How clever of you to have thought of that! but pardon me if I am wrong, I had a sort of vague idea that the primitive drama you refer to includes the beating to death of a lady, and bestowing her carcass afterwards upon a dog. You know the really intelligent animal who always appears to be waiting in anticipation of the corpse."

"Well, madam," demanded Mr. Aping-Ayres, "and did not precisely the same thing happen with regard to Jezebel as related in the Bible?"

Lady Blanche Argaffel stifled a yawn. "How clever you

are to think of such a thing!" she murmured. "I don't think I have ever read it."

Meanwhile Tinwhumpinny continued to beat a thoroughly artistic tarantelle upon the Arabian instrument, whilst the equally artistic assembly did a Noah's Ark procession into supper. Provided that a nightly repast took place in Noah's Ark the couples who paired off and passed into it must have always appeared more or less curious, but it is open to doubt if they ever presented a stranger assortment taken in twos than the highly artistic menagerie which shuffled into Lady Blanche Argaffel's large supper room to the sound of Tinwhumpinny's music.

Once seated around the long table they presented a heterogeneous combination which would baffle all description.

"As the youngest present, perhaps your small nephew will ask a blessing in suitable terms," announced the Bishop, who vainly endeavoured to squeeze himself into a comfortable position between the enormously fat 'cellist and a lady of almost equally generous proportions, who it was whispered wrote for the higher drama.

Tinwhumpinny thought for a second; it was a request which had never been made before to him.

Perhaps the figure of the fat 'cello player, huge and perspiring, with the greed of good things to come shining in his eyes, might have dominated his mind to the exclusion of aught else. . . .

"For what we are about to receive," faltered Tinwhumpinny, "may we never take more than we can comfortably enjoy."

"A good grace," declared the Bishop. Then beaming upon the fat musician beside him, the Bishop added innocently, "Many of us, sir, might take those words to heart as an example."

The fat man glared back upon the smiling Bishop. "Do you refer to me, sir?" the man of music gasped indignantly.

"Good gracious, no," said the Bishop.

"You looked at me, sir," retorted the fat man, as he commenced to wallow in his soup.

"I wasn't even conscious that you were there," replied the

Bishop, "save," he added truthfully, "that I was of course fully aware of your presence, as a neighbour, I may say."

"No offence," puffed the fat man.

"None in the world," serenely answered the Bishop, "but might I trouble you to move just a suspicion of a shade to the left, my dear friend? I find, maybe like yourself, with advancing years I cannot, ahem! in these crushes invariably reach the table. Thank you. Thank you."

The portly lady whose writings helped to elevate the drama, turned abruptly to Signor Sonorez the tenor singer, and asked with a sudden directness, which was almost sufficient to cause that artist a total loss of appetite, "Have you ever suffered from appendicitis?"

"My dear lady," enquired the artist wistfully, "do any of the notes in my lower register, which you have heard for yourself to-night, suggest even faintly the presence of that dread disease?"

"Far from it," grunted the lady playwright. "I at once suspected your freedom from it, owing to your scientific use of the diaphragm."

"Quite so, quite so," assented the singer gratefully.

"My whole . . ." continued the lady, who was rapidly consuming one well-larded plate after another with every sign of complacency, "is absorbed by one dread."

"Indeed," answered the singer.

"Yes," sighed the lady. "Appendicitis; I feel I am to be one of its victims, and yet what can one do? what ought one to do?"

If for a moment the singer, upon viewing the diminishing portions automatically succeeding each other upon the lady's plate, cast one unworthy thought upon the expediency of careful dieting, he suffered no hint of such a proposition to escape him.

"I really hardly know what one ought to do," he continued somewhat helplessly.

"Do! why of course there *is* only one thing to do," chimed in Reginald Chambers, who sat in his turn next to the vocalist and consequently close enough to the Lady Dramatist to hear her remarks—with a wave of his hand

suitable to the occasion, since he always found it necessary to act in public. "Only one thing to do. Look to the cæcum, madam. I speak with authority. Externally massage the abdominal muscles of the cæcum; I myself am massaged twice daily at an enormous cost, keep the cæcum clean—what is the result? All the pristine colours of youth reappear in the complexion of the face—all the early elasticity of youth rejuvenates the world-weary body—the disease is nipped in the bud, all through what! What! I ask you, but attending to the cæcum!"

"Yes," sighed the lady, "but what is the cæcum, dear Mr. Chambers?"

"The gut, madam, the gut; excuse me if I use a technical, I may say a medical term, but I speak without reserve upon such a mere matter of the bodily organs, involving as it does the issues of life and death."

"I trust, my Lord, I may speak before you without any stupidly conventional reserve," observed Reginald Chambers, whilst he stared haughtily at the Bishop.

"Do not let my presence restrain you in any way in your medical dissertation," rejoined the Bishop, in tones not intended to be either cordial or encouraging.

Thanking the Bishop with a grateful wave of one beringed hand, the actor proceeded. "There happens to be within the body of all of us, madam, an unfortunate cul-de-sac, if I can use the term, which slowly accumulates a poison filtering through the entire system. Perhaps it would effectively illustrate my remarks if I were to describe this cul-de-sac as a tiny Bovril bottle overbrimming with a virulent poison, which periodically overflows into our system, we all of us suffer therefrom from auto-intoxication. There is only one cure for auto-intoxication. Massage, madam, constant, unending massage."

How much more information the actor might have bestowed gratis upon the lady of the higher drama will never be known, for at that precise moment Mr. Aping-Ayres, who sat opposite and who had been freely replenishing his glass during silent but profound meditation upon the glories of wine as a universal benefit to mankind, awoke as it were from his trance.

"What!" exclaimed Aping-Ayres, aghast at hearing what he believed to be a treasonable utterance. "Reginaldo, can I believe my ears? Do I hear you, one of the High Priests in the Thespian Temple, a brother toiler as it were in the Thespian Fold, positively assert that the only cure for intoxication is massage? Rubbish, my dear Reginaldo, you must be dreaming. Thank Heaven, there *is no* cure for intoxication, the one remaining joy which life has reserved through all the ages."

"Ahem!" murmured the Bishop.

"Or to quote the immortal Bard who distinctly says: 'one fire burns out another's burning,' if the misguided venture to seek any antidote for the unutterably blissful state that Bacchus mercifully plunges all his votaries in at times: then and then only is it to be sought, in a fresh intoxication to honourably keep alive the memory of the former one."

"Ahem!" coughed the Bishop.

In vain the actor sought to stop the flowing remarks of Aping-Ayres, since their origin was due to a misapprehension upon that critic's part. Aping-Ayres declined to be silenced.

"Do you suppose," he continued, "that the immortal song of Omar Khayyám, which throughout is inspired with the very essence of the grape tenderly nurtured upon some Southern sun-kissed hill, could ever have given its lasting benediction to the world, if that great poet had not been ceaselessly fused with the fires emanating from its joyful presence careering through all his veins; had his senses not been constantly saturated through and through by reason of such joyous draughts? Unless you prefer to substitute an Eastern symbol, and instead of the cry of wine, glorious wine sparkling, and holy wine spilled, urge that his real meaning served only to cloak that other riot of the senses and emotions which the more generous Eastern mind lavishes upon all occasions in connection with its weaker but cherished sex."

"Ahem! Ahem!" coughed the Bishop.

"A really quite remarkable set of people," muttered that ecclesiastic to himself, since he had little hope of any of his remarks being heard by any one else. "I really cannot make up my mind whether I am quite out of my element here or in

it. Which, I wonder, which—for indeed one must endeavour to hear all and be broad-minded.” No doubt during the course of the evening the Bishop must have found ample opportunity to congratulate himself upon his decision. Any further debate the benevolent Bishop might have held with himself was interrupted at this juncture by a late arrival in the person of a famous actress. Late arrivals were quite the rule rather than the exception at all the Argaffel evenings. Indeed, people often arrived at a time in the early morning when it was afterwards difficult to surmise whether they had come to assist at an early and unconventional breakfast, or had merely lost their way upon the night before.

The famous actress, who from her appearance might have been made up quite successfully to represent either Salome or Cleopatra, sank with a pose successfully studied to represent nonchalant ease, into a vacant chair, and gave vent at intervals to a sort of firework display of dry sobs, which appeared to burst over her at intervals and shake her lithe wan frame from head to foot.

Lady Blanche Argaffel, who appeared to thoroughly understand this emotion, waggled the two feather plumes in her head as a token of greeting.

“Been playing *La Dame aux Camélias* again to-night, Bella?”

“Yes,” answered the wan lady with a convulsive sob, which shook her frame anew and incidentally the whole of her side of the table at one and the same time.

“Yes, I so live in that part, so acutely feel the life and live the sorrows of Marguerite Gautier, that I sob for hours afterwards. I sob even in the sanctity of my sleep,” added the lady with the becoming awe of one who has discovered something quite new in life.

“Take no notice of me, my dear,” she continued, “I may break down soon and sob and sob for hours, indeed my whole frame is overtuned as it were, my nerves are like some overstrung violin, stretched to breaking point and yet not snapping.”

The fat ‘cello player gave an amazed and indignant grunt and devoted himself anew to the delicacies heaped upon his plate with much relish.

"Try to drink," suggested Lady Blanche, comfortingly.

"Hush!" said the actress, as the spasm of yet another dry sob once again shook her. "Don't you know, dear, that most of my parts are lived in the horror of depicting drink. I never touch anything but water."

"Yes, dear, of course, I forgot," rejoined Lady Blanche, absently. "You must eat at once, try a wing of cold chicken, it is so comforting."

"No, no, nothing I implore you," murmured the actress. "I turn from food, I lead the simple life now, I touch nothing but apples and nuts. I have learned the one lesson of my life."

"Dear Bella, what was the one lesson of your great life," asked one of the Christian Science ladies, whose short-cropped hair contrived to give her quite a masculine appearance, and the aforementioned fastening of whose blouse, seen at closer quarters appeared more than ever to resemble leather bootlaces. "Tell me," urged the lady, assuming an expression of sudden soulfulness, struggling for mastery with stifled curiosity. "What was *the* lesson of your beautiful life?"

"Ptomaine," answered the actress sepulchrally. "Yes, yes, I don't often speak of it, but ptomaine. I was poisoned. Poisoned! Poisoned!"

The actress, who at moments seemed to be unconsciously copying the mannerisms at times appearing in the dialogue of Maeterlinck, once more whispered, "Poisoned." Poisoned—with a rhythm which was irresistible.

"No, dear," said the Christian Science lady, in modulated tones of wisdom. "You could not have been poisoned, you know. There is no such thing as matter, dear Bella. What appeared at the awful time you refer to, leading you to suppose you were poisoned were merely the subcutaneous suggestions emanating from the awful characters you have to depict so powerfully in the bad lives of others. To flood a pure body and soul such as yours, for the purposes of art, with all the auto-suggestions of moral and mental depravity which have invariably rendered such frail beings, historical and classical, was the real poison. Dear Bella, you should have denied it."

"Deny it!" echoed Bella, "I revel in it."

"Yes, dear, revel in it by all means, but deny it as well. You will find it difficult to believe, Bella, but in the early days of my enlightenment I was told by four separate medical men, all with letters after their names, that I had been poisoned by eating mussels. They told me that my body, through the inadvertency of a late supper in Soho, had been made an incubator for virulent bacteria. My beautiful fair flesh was actually disfigured with a horrible rash, which varied from the cool colour of freckles to blotches resembling splashes of port wine."

"Port wine," murmured Aping-Ayres at this juncture. "Oh! grateful wondrous beverage. Ganymede might well have handed it to the high Gods in cups of coruscated jewels."

After a cold stare in the direction of Aping-Ayres, the lady resumed her interrupted narrative.

"What do you suppose I did, Bella?"

"I hardly know, dear," the actress rejoined hesitatingly. "You have such strange ideas, so strange, so strange, I hardly know. So strange, so strange——" she continued to repeat dreamily.

"I absolutely denied the existence of every microbe," asserted the lady triumphantly. "Every time I viewed my seeming disfigurement in the mirror, I proclaimed aloud: 'There is no such thing as matter. Each of you dear, dear little microbes who have visited me, who have doubtless come as busy little comforters, have arrived in helpful numbers to do me good. I command each of you sweet invisible little soothers to stop imagining you are doing me good, now you have served the useful purpose of testing my faith. Go, dear ones, go, go.'"

"And did they go?" enquired the actress, who had forgotten to sob for quite a long while, possibly owing to her absorption in a large plate of green filbert nuts, and a slice of pineapple.

"Every one departed, dear Bella, as they were bidden. The house was swept and garnished, my flesh again, in common with Naaman the Scriptural leper, returned to me like that of a little child. (The Christian Science lady must have been forty if she was a day.) And I clapped my hands and cried,

'Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye, little visitors': just the same as our dear hostess might wave to us and send us cheerfully on our way as we depart in the fair silvan dawn. The doctors, dear, as doubtless in the case of Naaman, could not understand it at all, they were amazed!"

"Remarkable," muttered the Bishop, "really remarkable."

"I wonder if one of those four doctors chanced to have made diseases of the brain his particular speciality. Enquiry upon this point would be most interesting."

"Let us all go into the studio and have music and smoking there," said Lady Blanche. Whereupon her guests arose and flocked after her with the exception of the fat 'cellist, who usually lingered very late at table, declining to hasten his feast by a single mouthful, and who was happily oblivious to any demands made by either breeding or good taste which might seem in any way to impinge upon the excessive concessions to his appetite.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVENING CONTINUED AND FINISHED

THERE is in every assemblage of people, however brilliant, stupid, great or little they may happen to be, usually one whose personality or presence is received with a sort of silent deference, and what is even more important, such an one is listened to in silence: a silence which is a tribute in itself and which can seldom be under-rated since it is given only to the very few to command.

It might have been a mere artistic caprice, or even curiosity which caused Adolph Zorowitch to make a very unusual and late appearance at such a function. Whatever reason may be assigned, there could be no doubt that the presence of the little man with the almost Beethoven-like head, dressed in rather shabby evening clothes, caused in a quiet way more sensation than anything likely to happen during the evening.

The musical world of Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, St. Petersburg, to say nothing of London, had each proclaimed this artist to be within the first circle of the world's greatest living pianists.

Adolph Zorowitch, as he stood quietly beside his intelligent little Polish wife, alone seemed unconcerned in the fact that he was great. Successful he must have been, for rumour had it that it was almost impossible for him to spend the vast sums of money which his art brought him in from every quarter of the world. Rumour also had much truth in it when it declared that this amazing little man owned a Palace in Brussels overflowing with works of art, both ancient and modern.

Indeed his presence at all in the studio that night was probably owing to his admiration for Leon Argaffel's work, one of the best of whose statues could be found in the aforementioned Palace in Brussels.

Everybody in the room was fully conscious that this man was unquestionably beyond any of them as an artist, and as it frequently happens, not one of them attempted to speak to Adolph Zorowitch of his art, not even Lady Blanche Argaffel ventured to ask him to play.

Time cannot always be reckoned by either minutes or hours, but quite a long time after his first appearance in the room, maybe acting upon impulse or some more tangible appeal in the eyes of his hostess, Adolph Zorowitch slid gently into the big ring chair facing the full-sized open grand piano which seemed to take up little room as it nestled in the most darkened corner of the great studio, and commenced to play.

There was never anything but a fitful light in Leon Argaffel's lofty studio, even during the periods of his At Homes, so the subdued light was barely sufficient to show the expressions chasing each other over the faces of those present, whilst the little man sat isolated in his corner at the piano and played most wondrously, absorbed in his art and unconscious of aught else.

A curious silence had fallen over the room. The silence, the atmosphere, if one can use the term, was in itself significant, since it took place in the very midst of an aviary, so to speak, of jackdaws, magpies and starlings who loved to hear themselves chatter incessantly.

Aping-Ayres still continued to hug his glass feverishly, it is true, but he forgot to drink. The actress forgot her poses, and for awhile became almost natural. Lady Blanche Argaffel was pale beneath her light coating of rouge, and even the very fattest ceased to breathe anything but softly. All were listening. Indeed, who could help it? Playing such as this was more than an appeal. It was a command. One of the music poets of the world was conjuring up pictures; strange, vivid, wondrously coloured pictures.

Surely no jewels in the world sparkled like the jewels the

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pianist wrought. No pearls were brought up to the surface from the deep, like to those he produced from the depths of his treasure house. The silent groups, almost huddled together, nearly all painted pictures, and wrought things in bronze and marble; perhaps some of them wondered if their pictures could ever be like the pictures this little man was giving to them. Each of them it was true, saw a different picture, was lured by a different image, for the magic pipe of Pan was playing an elfish melody, and each one was dancing to it in a dream of their own. But what dreams! Lovely coloured things took gorgeous shapes, and then dissolved in violet mists, succeeding each other, chasing each other, as in the glittering peep-holes of some kaleidoscope, which might have been the plaything of all the arts even whilst it was turned in careless sport by one of the Gods. These people were all impressionists, and they were listening to the deep impression of a litany sung within the innermost temple, such as they had never listened to, and would never forget. Only a sort of murmur of astonishment in place of applause followed, whilst Chopin gave place to Liszt, Liszt to Scarlatti, and the last named composer was finally succeeded by the most simple of all that the great pianist had seen fit to give them of his art, the most simple, yet maybe the most profound.

Adolph Zorowitch could have told them that he was playing them a French Villanelle of his own composition, some might not have known this, others would not have cared so long as they were only allowed to listen.

What most of them realized as the artist played, seemed to be a little hillside in Brittany or the Finisterre, with the tinkle of the cattle bells in the distance, the trembling heavenly calm, making each sound the sweeter, conjuring all the sweet night odours of the laden air around one, until one experienced again all the first wonderful thoughts of early youth, of love and poetry, of wonderful yearnings that none of us can fully define. Then a shepherd lad played upon his pipe; the willing cattle followed him; the other things of the earth listened to him. Soon the evening bell sounded, as a little graveyard beyond the hillside, flooded by the sunset, seemed to reveal a

quaint church. The bell sounded yet again inside the crumbling turret, the choristers sang an evening hymn, the swinging incense burned, whilst within there was a big opened golden door in the reredos of the altar, beyond and above which, wonderful stained-glass windows showered their multi-coloured jewels staining the floor; another tinkling bell, which heralded a simple evening prayer, a prayer which came from the soul. The lights of the tapers burnt out one by one. Only the echo of one distant sheep bell from a neighbouring fold remained, before the vivid picture was flashed off the screen. The Villanelle was finished.

Some time after the last of the thundering applause had died away, soon after the impression was fading, and the guests were all talking in new groups, the Polish artist was aware of a curious little figure which came to the corner where he sat alone by the piano.

A little boy with both hands outstretched towards him, was regarding him fixedly. Two stray tears were standing in his eyes ready to fall. The child's almost spiritual face, appeared to be absolutely transfigured from its usual expression by some deep emotion, strangely unusual when seen upon the face of a child.

The great artist understood the look at once. So he said, as he made a place for Philip beside him: "A little brother artist, is it not? Yes, yes, I see of myself it is so. Those leetle tears you have do not grow in your eyes, in tha you are sad of my music, say, is it not, no?"

Philip shook his head.

"Tell me then, my leetle one, what you see as I play, that moves you so. Pictures, eh?" and the artist smiled a little.

Again Philip nodded.

"Will you not tell me of those pictures, yes?"

"It's all true what they have all said to-night, but I didn't know what it meant until you played."

"So what they say before I get here was that——"

"Yes. They said Art was to the artist, what the sun was to the earth. That all art was only the power of suggestion."

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The Polish pianist opened his eyes a little wider and regarded Philip curiously.

"Well, you played, and the sunlight was playing too."

"It is all true," continued the child. "I knew the hillside was there, and the church, and the stained-glass windows, but the doors that opened were those jewelled doors in the Kingdom of Heaven; you know, those in the Bible one could never understand. I understand now about them, it's really what you see *beyond them when they are opened* that matters. I saw a little what *was beyond them*. The ache afterwards means the tiny little that is left to remember by, after everything has been taken away. Even then," continued Philip, confidently, "all the doors were not opened, were they? I suppose we couldn't very well bear to have them all opened, it might spoil the rest, so I suppose they always open one by one for everybody, for the peeps beyond?"

The surprised man of music seemed lost in sheer amazement as he sat and looked at Philip in dumb astonishment.

"Go on talking to me, my leetle friend," said the musician at length. "Where is your home? who is your father, your mother? I would hear of you more to listen."

So Philip talked, and the great musician listened intently, and shrewdly pieced together the unconsciously revealed portions of a very gifted and very lonely little life, until the portly form of Martha appeared in the studio.

"Master Philip, you ought to have been in bed hours ago," announced Martha sternly.

It was then that the famous pianist took Martha upon one side and unburdened himself of much wisdom, some of the gist of which has been recorded previously, as having been stored in the worthy Martha's memory in a fashion peculiar to herself.

"Your little charge have in him much that is curious. In Germany such as he is called Wonder Child, the name of him is Genius everywhere."

"What might that be?" demanded Martha.

"A leetle sensitive plant, the flower be what you say, rare, so very rare. It do not thrive in the forcing house no, no, such as here. This house is the forcing house for him. No,

it do not thrive either in the ice-field, like his other home, no, it choked up there, so it die."

"Well, how can I help it?" demanded Martha.

"Good soul," said the musician, "do you look to him most careful. Do not let him to have too much of the one or of the other see you, for I have met them, ah, but seldom, and it is I that know, and I do tremble for it when I do find one of them."

Then the great man laid his hand gently on Philip's head, as tenderly as if he were indeed giving him a silent parting evening blessing.

"Good night, my leetle brother," said the pianist.

"Good night," answered Philip. "I shall always remember as long as I live."

"Why did he call me his little brother?" Philip asked gravely of Martha, as he made his way to bed.

"Because, Master Philip, I don't believe 'ee's all there in 'is 'ead," retorted Martha, "and nor ain't most of the rest of 'em for that matter."

CHAPTER V

MR. REGINALD CHAMBERS AND MR. ROBERT APING-AYRES AT HOME

It must not be for a moment supposed that either Mr. Reginald Chambers or Mr. Robert Aping-Ayres were merely grotesques in Bohemian and other society and held no other qualifications for their journey through life. Although both of them were in the perpetual condition of being exceedingly hard up, there can be little question that each of them made a very considerable sum of money annually out of their respective talents. That these said sums were made fitfully and expended recklessly cannot be denied, any more than the fact that however much they made was quite insufficient to support the style in which they lived.

These two eccentric individuals shared two big studios with rooms attached respectively in the front and back of one of the large and straggling old houses still to be found in Church Street, Chelsea. These apartments formed, so to speak, an entire big suite upon the first floor, and were reached by means of some very perpendicular old stairs each fully nine inches high. Mr. Aping-Ayres seldom used his rooms for any other purpose than to sleep in and at times occasionally pen some criticism or other in the small hours of the morning when he was sufficiently sober to allow his critical faculties to have full play.

After the celebration of any London Theatre's first night, Reginald Chambers, who occasionally heard his friend's faltering footsteps surmounting the difficulties of the aforementioned steep stairs, would, if awake himself, render first aid, so to speak,

by lowering a rope with a looped end down the almost perpendicular stairs, kept in his rooms for gymnastic purposes, in much the same way that a mariner might cast anchor from over the side upon a dark and uncertain night. His stumbling friend having grasped it in the darkness beneath, many nautical phrases of direction and encouragement passed between the two, during the ascent to bed.

"Art thou grounded, Roberto, noble heart?" would be the usual enquiry of Reginaldo from the head of the unlighted stairs.

"Aye, aye," invariably hiccoughed Aping-Ayres.

"Take thy moorings, Roberto," Reginaldo would continue encouragingly, "grapple thee with hooks of steel. Art caught, belated mariner?"

"Aye, aye," Aping-Ayres would respond from the inky well beneath.

"Right oh! holly heave oh, haul," Reginaldo would sing out as he continued to pull in the rope, with Aping-Ayres attached, whose boots would beat a muffled tattoo upon the high steps during his ascent.

Once landed in safety at the top Aping-Ayres' future arrangements for the night were usually determined by his companion according to his condition, and as to whether he could be conducted down a fairly long passage to his own apartments or whether, as was sometimes the case, it was thought more expedient by his faithful friend Reginaldo that he should immediately rest and recuperate upon the sofa kept for that purpose in Reginaldo's first room immediately at the head of the staircase.

Now it was a curious fact that whichever of these two alternatives eventually came to pass, Reginaldo, perhaps by way of gentle rebuke of a nature which his friend might be able to understand, always contrived to hold a form of short evening service with musical honours which he performed himself. With the utmost gravity he would chant over his recumbent friend:

"Roberto was a drunken wight,
A very drunken wight was he,
Who sat up very late at night,
Then went to bed perplexedly."

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Taking this as a preliminary chant, Reginaldo would then by way of an anthem, not devoid of a symbolical suggestion, sing a two-line fragment culled from the Ancient and Modern Hymn-book, commencing, "Now the day is over," and his friend, in whatever condition he might happen to have returned home, invariably droned the air and words with him in unison, although it must be confessed that Mr. Aping-Ayres, who could never sing at the best of times, seldom showed his musical abilities to their best advantage upon these occasions. It is upon record that once and only once Aping-Ayres was so advanced that he could remember neither the words nor the music of this soothing good-night hymn which his fantastic friend had taught him. In consequence of this painful lapse of memory his friend was for once inexpressibly shocked, and considering his case hopeless left him to himself with feelings akin to those of Hamlet's ghost-stalking sire, "More in sorrow than in anger."

Although Reginald Chambers never ceased to talk about himself in public, he never breathed a word to the world at large that he was in reality and despite his affected and aristocratic appearance, a remarkably fine athlete.

Only a few of his very intimate friends were aware of the fact that Mr. Chambers was an expert swordsman, a splendid boxer, a champion swimmer, and probably one of the best pistol shots in London.

All these accomplishments, with the exception of the swimming, as well as sundry others, he continued to practise, together with his speaking voice, of which he was excessively proud, at odd moments within the precincts of his big back-floor studio.

It was, therefore, no uncommon thing within the house to hear the well-known lines of either Romeo or Hamlet being shouted aloud during any hour of the day or night, accompanied by the clanging sound of steel as Mr. Chambers shouted with assiduity lines allotted to the characters he was never destined to play, whilst he slew his imaginary adversaries with the sword.

With the remarkable forethought which distinguished him in life, Mr. Chambers had chosen the back set inasmuch that

it afforded him ample warning when his not infrequent creditors stumbled up the stairs, and permitted that gentleman a means of escape conveniently situated upon the other side of the room by reason and means of a rickety flight of wooden stairs that offered a temporary retreat, with a back yard leading conveniently into another street.

It was solely on account of these advantages that Mr. Chambers was known to describe his rooms as the most conveniently situated of any in London.

Perhaps the only person this worthy found it impossible to escape from was his landlady, Mrs. Wildgoose, who was without doubt the one person upon earth of whom Mr. Reginald Chambers stood in secret awe. It is true that to her face he would call the lady (the rustling of whose shabby genteel silk dress always upset his nerves) "a bird of prey," "a domestic anaconda—eating him out of house and home," "a pelican," together with any other choice phrase that entered into his fantastic head, but deep down in his heart Reginaldo feared her advances, dreaded the bills she presented him with, which were as long as her own face, and secretly experienced kindred feelings with those gentlemen in the Tower of London whose last attention to the young Princes brought them into historical prominence.

The presentation of Mr. Chambers' monthly bills did not take place without the observance of much ceremony. Mrs. Wildgoose would make her appearance towards the close of Mr. Chambers' all too scanty breakfast, with a dry cough, a long face and equally long bill, crinkling all over in her silk dress and hovering like a morning bird of evil omen over the recumbent figure of Mr. Chambers, as he gleaned the morning's news, whilst attired in a dressing-gown of almost Eastern splendour.

Mrs. Wildgoose would not immediately reach the point of her morning's visit, but would use considerable strategy, the variations accompanying which, however intricate, never appeared to exhaust her ingenuity.

"My husband, sir," Mrs. Wildgoose would commence with a prefatory cough.

"Brave fellow," Reginaldo would murmur, "what of him, Mrs. Wildgoose, what of your inestimable husband?"

"He feels he would like to visit the sea."

"So should I, Mrs. Wildgoose, so should I," Reginaldo would cry with enthusiasm. "Oh, for a glimpse of the amethystine sea! What would I not give to disport my classic limbs like a diving dolphin amidst the azure waves flecked with foam!" averred Reginaldo, peering into the morning milk jug, as if that domestic article mirrored within itself the airy picture he conjured up.

"Yes, sir, but ——"

"But listen, do not interrupt my flow of imagery, Mrs. Wildgoose. I see myself," Reginaldo would continue, "a happy, happy child, one of Nature's sea-foam children, throwing careless pebbles into the dancing sea—seeing nothing but ——"

Here Mrs. Wildgoose, despairing of Reginaldo ever indeed seeing her bill, thrust a portion of those papers into his waving hand.

"Bills?" Mr. Chambers would enquire haughtily. "Do you mean, madam, that these bills are for me?" he would ask with the injured air of one who had made it a point through life of always constantly settling for everything in cash.

"Yes, sir, and you see as there is no money in the house, and as my husband must go to the seaside now for his holidays, for a breath of fresh air, I had hopes——"

"Ah!" Reginaldo would exclaim dramatically. "And what of my hopes, madam, my beautiful broken hopes; my cherished hopes of being a glistening sportive dolphin, my nostrils aching for the fragrant ozone, doomed to pine in London in the over-heated temples of the drama, getting pale, weaker, thinner every day. Can I go to the sea?"

"I'm sure I hope so, sir," ventured Mrs. Wildgoose.

"You know I cannot, madam," moans Reginaldo reproachfully. "You know such exquisite, open air delights are not for me, then why, my dear lady, in God's name should your husband enjoy them? Do not speak another word, you have upset me for the day."

"Well, sir, of course if you insist the bills must remain and ——"

"And increase," adds Reginaldo, catching at a straw,

"remain and increase, whilst I, like Chatterton, conjure the misty dawns, implore the stars, 'like wonder wounded hearers,' through the windows of this most uncomfortable garret and dream of emoluments to come."

"Very well, sir," sighs Mrs. Wildgoose, regretfully. "Very well——"

"*Not* very well, Mrs. Wildgoose, not very well, madam, 'all's ill about my heart.' Please go."

When the door is safely closed upon Mrs. Wildgoose, Mr. Reginald Chambers grins a salutation to his own reflection in the shabby mirror facing him, as if he were greeting a dear acquaintance.

"Brave fellow," he murmurs. "The personality of the great never fails to impress the suppliant creditor, gaining the gracious time which is so necessary. Ah! Reginaldo, Reginaldo, if ever you lose your power of impressing your personality upon others, then indeed the hounds will harry you to the death. Then indeed will you become the prey of tailors, hatters, laundrymen and landladies; then, 'then will crack the noble heart.'"

"Reginaldo," says the voice of Aping-Ayres at the door.

"Enter merry morning soul," commands Reginaldo.

"Did I hear the voice of the vulture?" enquires Aping-Ayres, cautiously.

"Aye, Roberto, and lo! that evil bird of prey has shed her bill."

"Two," replies Roberto, cryptically. "She left one with me."

"I shall put mine in the china rose bowl," asserts Reginaldo, "which is the unfailing repository for everything I want to forget."

"It seems full already," replies his friend.

"The petals drop in one by one," returns his friend airily, "yet there is room for another leaf, I know. Roberto, I am seized with an idea."

"Is that all," grunts his friend, ungraciously, "you ought to be thankful it is not with anything worse wearing a uniform."

"Hush! I want a holiday," announces Reginaldo. "I want to walk into the wilds, I want to be a child of Nature."

"Right ho!" agrees Aping-Ayres, "let's be twins."

"Let's see for means," debates Reginaldo.

Not to be outdone Roberto extemporizes guilelessly:

"I do remember a pawnbroker,
And hereabouts he dwells,
Which late I noted."

"Roberto," enquires Reginaldo, anxiously. "Have you stealthily hidden in your apartments rich jewels of Tartary, bright silks from Barbary, bright treasures naughtily and selfishly concealed whilst we lack? Speak, Roberto. Have you, like Ananias, secretly reserved unto yourself things from the common fund, whilst having plausibly lied to me, your friend?"

"No," chuckles his friend, "mostly everything's gone that's worth pawning, save alone five small Dutch panels painted on wood. We can get three quid a time easy on them any day."

"Fifteen pounds," sighed Reginaldo, "and I always so admire the Dutch school."

"Let's hope the pawnbroker will," says Roberto. "Come, help me carry the household Teraphim round the corner, assist me to dismantle my ruined hearth and home."

"Brave fellow," says Reginaldo, "it will give us a fortnight's extravagant holiday."

"A respite from ceaseless creditors," interpolates Roberto.

"A cessation from the blood-sucking wiles of the eternal domestic anaconda," grinned Reginaldo.

"Wandering irresponsibly over green meads and tree-twined groves," giggled his friend.

"I could weep for joy of the idea," sniggered Reginaldo.

"Sweet exploring Babes in the Wood," laughed Roberto.

"Ha, ha, ha, positively financed in contradiction of all historical tradition by one of the wicked uncles."

"Children of Nature," purred Reginaldo.

"Twins," cackled Aping-Ayres, "so let's pawn the props and start."

CHAPTER VI

THE COMPOSITION OF A HOUSEHOLD

PHILIP stood and buried his small head deep between the showers of wild clematis, jessamine and honeysuckle that overflowed the bungalow house upon three of its sides. The fourth side was open to the sea, the rocks and the rich yellow sand.

Two sturdy brown arms encased in a shabby tweed jacket, gathered all of the growing flowers it was possible to hold at once round his head and under his nose, whilst a pair of small but exceedingly healthy lungs breathed with the regularity of bellows, drinking in gusts of satisfaction.

"Philip goes through this ridiculous performance every night," observed his mother, seated a little distance away, in her usually thin and acrid tones. Thin lines of perpetual disapprobation, mingled with self-imposed piety, possibly inherited from a long line of Puritan ancestors, always appeared around her thin mouth whenever anything appeared to the lady to involve any outward expression of the senses.

Her sister, Lady Janet, looked up shrewdly from her knitting without pausing in the placid occupation which appeared to all casual observers to have absorbed the greater portion of her life.

"Philip is curious," observed Aunt Janet. "Only once in my life have I ever encountered such a wild riot of the senses for the sake of the senses themselves, united to a spirituality so strange that probably none of us can even understand."

Her sister only sniffed mistrustfully and pursed up her hard thin lips a little tighter.

"In the other case," continued Lady Janet, unabashed, "the united qualities I mentioned belonged to a famous poet, who shot himself."

"Disgraceful," answered her sister, then in a firm tone, which might have done credit to Queen Mary dispatching the last batch of recruits to the faggots, she added: "He could not have believed in God or in the Day of Judgment to have done anything so wicked as that. Perhaps you remember what is said in Revelations."

"Your boy," continued the Lady Janet, as if she had not been unduly alarmed at the underlying threat contained in the Biblical indictment, "your boy will either be a great poet, or perhaps a saint or a very great sinner."

The Lady Janet's sister directed a look of hurt acidity towards the unconscious Philip, who, with the persistence of the big bumble bee, was still taking his fill of the flowers.

The thoughts of the injured lady ran much in this strain. How can it be possible that beside a healthy yellow religious chicken, a brown curious duckling should have been given me to disgrace my sanctified fold? A great resentment arose at the very thought of such an extraordinary prank upon the part of Nature, the nature which she and her model daughter understood as little about as could be seemingly possible in this world.

"I fail to see," observed Philip's mother, with her resentment rising as it invariably did at the mention of anything which was unusual and which she could not understand. "I utterly fail to see that Philip is anything except a very ordinary type of little boy." The note of misgiving in her voice, however, somewhat belied her words.

"Ordinary!" It was Lady Janet's turn to sniff this time. "Are you aware how he designates his present occupation?"

"No," snapped her sister. "How should I know why he does anything so ridiculous? Really, Janet, I cannot know every stupid thought that passes through the mind of a boy of thirteen."

The Lady Janet kept the opinion that her worthy sister knew absolutely nothing and was never likely to do so, to herself. As a widow not possessing any children of her own,

Aunt Janet felt, not without good reason, that her view of things might be disregarded.

"What," continued her sister querulously, "do you suppose he *thinks* he is doing?"

"Inhaling the whole blest fragrance of the holy night," replied Lady Janet, whilst a smile lurked around the corners of her good-humoured mouth.

"Don't be ridiculous, Janet."

"I used his own words. I should never have thought of such a thing myself," confessed Lady Janet truthfully, "any more than I should have thought of the unusual criticism of the big picture I took him to see in Chevister yesterday. It was on exhibition in the town and occupied two entire shop fronts curtained over. I paid a shilling each for Philip and myself to see it. The artist was unknown, but he was supposed to have been great, and the subject was a landscape showing a sunset. Philip thought it was simply awful. When we came outside the sun was beginning to set over the sea, and as you know the sunsets during the last few evenings have been remarkable. More in fun than anything else I asked Philip if he preferred it as a picture. He only laughed. I asked him why he laughed, and he declared it was because God had painted the one, and God only knows who could have painted the other."

"Dreadful! I shall speak to him about it at once, and punish him."

"Tut, tut, tut. Why punish him? You are always punishing him for little things, repressing him, stifling him. Why repress him? If you keep up that process long enough, as you and Mealie threaten to do, one day he will burst out into a flame in the opposite direction."

Her sister's only answer was a suspicious sniff, alternated with a shudder. The word "flame" had immediately suggested to the Puritan mind of Philip's mother, the Hades so continually in her thoughts together with its cheerful landscape."

"Send him to a far bigger and better school than the one he attends at present," continued Janet, "where in process of time everything will be levelled and only the best predominate. He is sturdy—and—and——" Lady Janet hesitated for

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words for a second, "brilliant and unusual. A good public school is the place for him."

Philip's mother did not wait to hear any more of her sister's remarks; with a lowering countenance she hurried into the house, doubtless with the immediate intention of setting somebody or something to rights.

Martha observed her mistress approach from the kitchen window without fear, but not without misgiving, for Martha in her own way could judge to a nicety every expression of temperament, not to say temper, upon the faces of both her mistress and her daughter, and of the two, thought Martha, "if there is a choice to be made, I prefer the mother." Undoubtedly the narrow mind of Philip's mother was upset. How dare her sister Janet presume to talk to her in that preposterous way of Philip! Philip, Philip, always Philip, who was annoying her, what right had he to be anything different from the docile creature that his sister had been at his age?—his sister, who had always been a comfort to her, and who had implicitly agreed with her in everything and had followed her everywhere with a filial devotion which was beyond praise. Philip—brilliant, unusual, the two words she disliked and distrusted most in the whole dictionary. How dare Aunt Janet suggest that Philip would burst out into flames? Very well, if that was the case, Philip's mother resolved that she would stamp the flames out in time. Judging from the expression of the lady's face when she reached Martha and the kitchen, she appeared fully capable of stamping out anything.

"Martha," commenced Philip's mother.

"Yes, mum."

"How many times have I told you 'ma'am,' *not* 'mum'?"

"Well, ma'am."

"How is it that you are washing up the tea-things at this hour?"

"Well, ma'am, not mum, ma'am."

"I don't want any 'wells,' I don't want any excuses: how is it? I have told you repeatedly that each time of the day has its own method and its own work, a regular routine without this perpetual lagging behindhand. You have not even made the first preparations, or indeed any, for supper."

"No, mum."

"'Ma'am,' and why is the best broom I bought you for the stair carpet lying outside on the path? You know it is not the place for it. How many times have I told you that everything has a place? Even a servant has her place, and the place of a servant is to obey her mistress and do correctly, willingly, and cheerfully what God has given her to do."

"Yes, mum, I know. I've done the work all right. And among the things God has given us is children, mum, ma'am."

"Children? How dare you make excuses! What do you mean?"

"Well, mum, there's little Master Philip, him and me have been having quite a nice game, mum, and if he did use the best broom, mum, it was only in fun, and he hasn't done it no harm: it is the hour, mum, when children love a game of play."

"You can keep your opinion concerning children until it is asked for, Martha. When you have children of your own it will be time for you to bring them up, in any slipshod, romping, untidy, or disobedient fashion you may choose, but understand once and for all I will not allow Philip to upset and interfere with the work of the house; he is the perpetual cause of the disarrangement of everything; understand, I will not have it."

"Oh, mum, I mean ma'am, I'm sure he don't interrupt me, he's a dear little fellow, and——"

"How dare you contradict me? You seem to forget that the first duty of a good servant is obedience. Obedience, humility, willingness, and not perpetually excuses, hasty answers and slothfulness. Had you even troubled to read the pamphlet I gave you yesterday, you would have found the means by which all these things can be gained, but no," added the lady scornfully, as she marched to the dresser, "here it is unopened, you have not even troubled to cut the leaves. It is of little use professing to be a Christian, if one does not even trouble to gain Christian truths when they are placed in one's very hands."

"But I ain't had time to read it."

"What! no time! Always your excuse, Martha, no time to read the words of one of God's ministers, but plenty of time to waste in stupid play with Master Philip, after I have distinctly told him that life is intended for work and not for play at all."

During this harangue Martha had been washing up the tea-things, to all intents and purposes a model of sublime self-repression.

"But somebody must have a game of play with him sometimes."

"Then it shall not be you," snapped Martha's mistress. "He is ready enough at all times to play with the unutterably common fisher-children, and comes home with his clothes in a disgraceful condition, but I am determined he shall not hinder you. Look at you now, you haven't finished the tea-things yet."

At this moment Mealie entered the kitchen with her face perfectly expressing injured acidity. Now amongst other natural gifts, Mealie possessed a way of speaking to a servant that was almost an insult in itself.

"Martha, what did I request you to do this morning?"

"A good many things, miss," promptly replied Martha.

"Please don't answer me, it seldom does any good."

"No, that it don't," thought Martha.

"You know perfectly well I told you to bring my night-dress case downstairs and iron it."

"Where is the iron," demanded the virgin owner of the article in question.

"On the rack, miss."

"Is it heated and ready?"

"No, miss."

"Really," observed Mealie, "it seems very little use my giving you orders when you do not take the slightest notice of them. The usual excuse, I suppose, you forgot."

"Yes, miss, I forgot," admitted Martha, briefly.

At this juncture the mother of Mealie, who had scanned the dresser vainly in search of faults, and who could discover nothing reprehensible save that Martha had not opened one single pamphlet bestowed upon her for spiritual edification,

and that Philip had converted a gaily coloured religious almanack into a soldier's cap with the silver nutmeg grater actually clasping the best red feather duster brush by way of a flippant cockade, found fit to join in once more.

"Of course one can expect nothing done whilst Philip wastes her time and thoroughly disarranges the entire system of the house. She admits she has been playing with Philip."

"Philip is beyond all," announced Mealie. "Really he is so excessively trying one requires the patience of Job."

A heartfelt "yes" bursting as it were unconsciously at that moment from Martha, caused Mealie to stare enquiringly at the servant.

"What did you say?" demanded Mealie, whose suspicions were aroused that Martha's sudden answer in the affirmative might by chance be ambiguous.

"Me, miss? Nothing, miss."

"You certainly said something," insisted Mealie loftily, "but whatever you said is of no consequence. I want no answers and I require no impertinence. But you understand you iron that nightdress case before you do anything else."

"No," interrupted Mealie's mother, "before she does anything else, she will go to Philip in the garden and say he is to be sent to bed at once as a punishment; he will not be given any supper whatever, also as a punishment."

"I am sure he deserves it, mother; what *else* has he been doing?"

"He used what I consider a blasphemous expression whilst conversing with your Aunt Janet. I intend to punish him; I shall send him to bed and to be alone in his room upon every occasion he uses expressions which I consider unfitting and unbecoming a Christian child."

"I can't think where he learns such ways, ma," said Mealie, then she added hopefully:

"I'm afraid he will always be in disgrace."

"Martha, do as you are told," commanded Philip's mother, "go at once to Master Philip, and see he goes to bed at once," and added Mealie, "When he is in his room, kindly lock the door, upon other occasions I have had a suspicion he does not always remain in his room."

Amidst feelings which it would perhaps be better to avoid describing, since they bore reference to her two mistresses, kind-hearted Martha hastened upon her unwelcome mission.

Little Philip only nodded when the indignant Martha communicated her orders to him.

"It's a shame, dearie," confessed Martha, "and such a lovely fine night too, just the very sort of night when you and me could have a nice walk in the cool lanes and no end of a fine romp in the hay fields."

Philip smiled.

"And you," continued Martha, with a heat occasioned by the treatment of her favourite charge, "you take it that good natured like a little angel, 'cos you only smile."

"Martha," said Philip, confidently; "would you like to be a conspirator?"

"I sometimes thin': I should," admitted Martha, who was not quite certain in her mind but that a conspirator must be something very dreadful, not entirely unconnected with gunpowder plots in the Tower of London and such like things.

"When I think of you, dearie, being shut up when you ought to be out and playing and enjoying yourself, and being happy, I feels I could be anything," declared Martha, mysteriously. "Shut up in your bedroom, indeed, a summer night like this."

"Martha," enquired Philip, "do you really think I shall be there?"

"Lor, Master Philip, where else should you be?" asked the startled Martha. "Why, I've a got to see you in your room and lock the door and take the key downstairs."

"Oh, Martha, Martha!" confided Philip, "after all the times you have admired the honeysuckle and the wild jessamine and the ivy and clematis almost smothering my bedroom window, have you never noticed anything else?"

"No, Master Philip, I ain't noticed nothing else," admitted the puzzled Martha. "What should there be to notice?"

"If you haven't noticed anything it doesn't matter."

"I've noticed you pays more attention to the big flower bed underneath your bedroom window than you do to the

others, Master Philip, it's your favourite flower bed now, ain't it, why you are for ever tending it and raking it over."

"Yes," said Philip. "You see, Martha, the feet of the little people *jump* and *dance* at nights, perhaps upon that very flower bed."

"Lor, Master Philip, do you believe in fairies?"

"Yes, Martha, and other things," answered Philip, "you know just the things that other boys believe in."

"Martha," sourly demanded the voice of Mealie at this juncture, "I thought you were told to take Master Philip to bed, and lock the door, and bring the key downstairs."

"Yes, miss, coming."

"You are not coming, Martha, do not tell me an untruth, you are loitering, making no effort to do as you are told."

The retreat of Martha and Philip to the supposed place of punishment passed for the moment without further observation, owing to the village postman having just delivered the evening letters. This worthy functionary was usually rewarded with a pamphlet to his intense chagrin, and nobody could have told better than Philip, who roamed the lanes and hedgerows, the eventual destination of these means to Grace.

Upon this particular occasion even the postman was allowed to depart in peace, for Philip's mother appeared to be petrified by the contents of a somewhat lengthy letter, written in a distinctly foreign but undoubtedly cultured handwriting.

To aver that Philip's mother gave an enraged snort, followed by a mirthless and unpleasantly short laugh, upon perusal of the epistle she had received, would hardly be sufficient to describe that lady's feelings of haughty indignation.

Since the lady remained sullen and taciturn during the whole of the evening, and in consideration of the fact that all tracts and pamphlets were ruthlessly swept from off her usually methodical writing table in order that the owner of it might scratch over four sheets of writing paper with a squeaky quill, the Lady Janet was forced in sheer curiosity to enquire of her sister if she was writing an important letter.

"I am answering an impertinent one," announced the Lady Marian, coldly.

"Indeed," ventured Lady Janet.

"I have thoroughly made up my mind that it is the very last time Philip shall ever be permitted to go to the Argaffels' house."

"Yes, ma," observed Mealie, maliciously, who had for years fished in vain for an invitation to The Towers. "I always said that it never did Philip any real good, half his airs and graces and extraordinary behaviour are, in my opinion, due to his visits there."

"What has happened?" broke in Lady Janet, abruptly.

"An impertinent man, a musician, has had the audacity to suggest that he and his wife shall adopt Philip for life."

"Good gracious, ma," said Mealie, "how odd!"

"Be silent, Mealie," commanded her mother, and Mealie sniggered and subsided obsequiously.

"He has the effrontery to inform me—me, Philip's mother, that he considers Philip a genius. Read the epistle," said the lady, whose face was even whiter than its wont from rage, as she tossed the missive across to Lady Janet.

The Lady Janet read the letter. It was beautifully written, delicately and beautifully expressed in perfect English, and at that moment perhaps Aunt Janet alone realized the wonder and generosity of the famous musician's offer.

When she arrived at the end of the letter and saw the signature, even Aunt Janet was slightly startled.

"Marian," said Aunt Janet, earnestly, "why, he is one of the greatest men in the world to-day."

"I have never even heard of the creature," sneered her sister, "have never even met him."

"My dear Marian, you are hardly likely to, you never go to a concert and——"

"And don't want to," snapped Philip's mother. "Do you not suppose I had sufficient of them during my husband's lifetime?"

"But you did not go to them then, Marian?"

"I did not," affirmed the lady. "Concerts, Theatres, Opera Houses indeed, hells and haunts of the devil. Musicians indeed, artists, geniuses—children of the devil with the manners and propensities of madmen."

"I think you are unnecessarily severe," reproved Aunt Janet, "at any rate in this instance you are quite wrong. Adolph Zorowitch is one of the world's very Princes of Art."

"I don't care if he is a king and lives in a palace."

"Which is precisely what he does," interpolated Aunt Janet, "when he can get the time to go home. He and his clever Polish wife have the entrée to the finest society of the day."

"My own name is quite sufficient to ensure Philip's entering society whenever it is deemed advisable to do so," retorted her sister, "without the special intercession of a wandering Pole."

"My dear Marian," observed Aunt Janet in a more severe tone than she had yet adopted, "I consider this the chance of little Philip's lifetime. You do not understand him, have told me dozens of times that you do not want him; here are two great people who do both. I consider it a wonderful offer; Marian, don't be obstinate and short-sighted, think it well over; it is, I repeat with all my heart, a wonderful offer."

"You think so, do you? then read my answer to it, and understand my final decision, and stop talking nonsense."

Aunt Janet received the answer her sister had written in silence, and perused it with feelings of mingled sorrow and shame. Letter-writing was not a conspicuous gift with the Lady Marian, and Aunt Janet thought how oddly it contrasted with the musician's perfectly worded appeal as she read Lady Marian's letter:

"SIR,

"I am in receipt of your extraordinary letter in which you do me the honour to suggest the adoption of my son Philip. The collection of people who frequent my sister's house in London does not leave me totally unprepared for any surprise with regard to eccentricities, failing a stronger term, in which they may seem fit to indulge.

"With regard to your suggestion that my son should be brought up as an artist, in whatever sense that term may be implied, strikes me as being preposterous since I retain a vivid recollection of his father's many reprehensible shortcomings

whilst engaged in a similar capacity, for which my personal prejudices and feelings made ample atonement.

"My son will eventually be trained for the Church, and should he be found sufficiently worthy, his grandfather will, after my son has mastered his preliminary Christian duties as a minor curate, doubtless bestow one of the country livings within his gift upon him.

"He will be trained with a fear of the Lord and an ever-present sense of the Day of Judgment, which so many of us find it convenient to ignore.

"Permit me to express my surprise that my son should have so far forgotten the careful training he has received from me, as to impress you with the fanciful, and to me incomprehensible qualities of imagination you see fit to attribute to him. I can only conclude that one of my sister's indigestible suppers may have occasioned some temporary disorganization of the stomach or brain, which disorder I shall make it my especial care to remove by a plain bread and milk diet judiciously administered.

"It might be possible to thank you for the mistaken honour you do me, if I could view it in the light of anything but an impertinence.

"Concluding that you and your wife thoroughly understand my views upon the subject,

"I remain, etc., etc."

Next day, when this epistle reached its destination in London, the great man, who was preparing to depart for Brussels, sighed. "It would be humorous if it were not so pathetic," he observed, as he handed it to his wife. "So it is to be the ice-field and the refrigerator for the sensitive plant, as a preliminary for the stones of the altar. I may be wrong, but I think not. No, I am afraid if they insist he go to that work he will set light to the Church and what a commotion there will be over the fire! I never really felt the strong significance of Baalam's ass with regard to the angel until to-day, my dear."

* * * *

That evening before Martha went to bed, which she

usually did about ten o'clock, she had occasion to go to her mistress's room upon some trivial and domestic errand.

Her mistress had not heard her enter from where she sat, over her dressing case, which was open showing the several elegantly mounted bottles and cases it contained. The sound of Martha's footsteps caused her to turn her head sharply.

"How dare you creep into the room?" demanded the Lady Marian.

"I beg pardon, mum, I mean ma'am, I——"

"Leave the room," ordered her mistress in a thick husky voice. "Leave at once, do you hear?"

Martha turned to do as she was bid without another word.

"Well," murmured Martha, as she ascended to bed, "I could almost swear that she——" then Martha broke off and added, "unless it's only passion and temper, and she do go in for both at times, and I ought to know, for I comes in for it, same as Master Philip."

CHAPTER VII

MR. REGINALD CHAMBERS AND MR. APING-AYRES VERY MUCH AWAY FROM HOME

MR. ROBERT APING-AYRES, as he stretched himself amidst the bracken so that his recumbent form contrived to get every ounce of comfortable ease afforded by the shady dingle into which his wanderings had finally brought him, nodded contentedly towards the trellis work of wild roses clustering over his head, and addressed his friend Reginaldo by way of precaution lest he should fall asleep.

"We have now revelled in rustic simplicity for fourteen days," he commenced, "fourteen healthy sun-burned sober days."

"Sober?" queried his friend in polite astonishment. "It seems to me, Roberto, that you have consumed upon the way a sufficient quantity of home-brewed amber ale to have rendered most mortals speechless."

"I was lured like the wayward one who dallied upon the way in the arbours described in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' solely by reason of the fascinations and allurements of the many fair and deft-handed sibyls who served us with the ambrosial cup," rejoined Roberto.

"Your powers of fascination with regard to barmaids are almost mesmeric," yawned Reginaldo. "At every tavern at which we have sojourned upon our way, you seem to have repeated your conquests."

"It was a triumph of the commonplace."

"What I wish to discover," continued Reginaldo, gravely, "is whether your head is exceptionally strong, or whether

your body is only a sort of abnormal tank for the capacity of storing beer."

"Very hurtful," answers Roberto. "However, without taking any offence at the rudeness which is one of the component parts of your complex nature, I should like to point out to you that our common purse is running low, very low."

"A purse is never common until it is empty," retorted Mr. Chambers, "it then becomes intolerable, I may say, very." "

"We have just sufficient," continued his friend, not heeding the interruption, "to pay our return fares to the gay city of London, from which gay city we have reached the extreme south coast by easy stages. We have only our flannel suits, and one small kit bag," he said, viewing the article in question which reposed beside him in the bracken, "nothing to sell and nowhere to sell it even if we had, so what do you see before us, Reginaldo?"

"A casual ward for two in some rustic workhouse," droned Reginaldo lazily, "and," continued that gentleman, "as I have always understood sleep to be impossible in such a place, I mean to procure it here, in this most sylvan of dingles, whilst I can."

"Wake up, oh pessimistic soul," said his friend, cheerfully, "it is no time to sleep, but to think."

"When the weasels and the hedgerow stoats are done out of their home and board, what do they do?"

"How, in the name of Heaven, should I know?" demanded Reginaldo, "and am I to understand, Roberto, that you compare me, Reginaldo, to these disgusting creatures of the field?"

Roberto only chuckled. He congratulated himself upon the fact that he was, at least, keeping his companion awake.

"They are known for their wisdom and speed in seeking new and comfortable quarters," essayed Roberto, "and, with a view to our now straitened circumstances, I propose to follow the little wise example of the furry weasel and the stealthy stoat. Cast your memory back, Reginaldo, don't you know who lives close to this very place?"

"How on earth should I know? I've never been in the beastly place in my life before, and if we are destined to walk, even a portion of the way home, I jolly well wish we had never come."

"And this is the eager soul," cooed Roberto, "who wished to be a child of nature, who yearned to be one of the babes in the wood."

"So I did," grunted Reginaldo, fretfully, "but I don't want to stay in this beastly wood, without any money."

"A sordid soul, methinks," reflected Roberto, "he no longer enjoys the wild roses, the honeysuckle, the wild thyme, all nature's heaped-up treasures, woven for our particular benefit: all, all these mean nothing. He thirsts, instead, for common gold. Lo, I wandered forth with an idealist, but, alas, the unseen hand of some magician has converted the once noble heart into a gross materialist."

"If you have any comforting suggestion to make," said Reginaldo, "let's have it, if not, let me sleep, before my mind becomes a prey to the nightmare of poverty, that admits of no further repose."

"Well, it has occurred to me," said Roberto, "that a sister of our great friend, Lady Blanche Argaffel, lives in this very place. She is, I presume, the mother of that strange, small product, I christened Tinwhumpinny."

"Now," continued Roberto, gaily, "the Argaffels are well and, as we know, very hospitable. I believe the other sister, Lady Janet, is also rich and hospitable, it is, therefore, fairly safe to surmise that the third sister, whom it would be monstrous to suppose is behindhand in the family traditions, is also rich, and we may assure ourselves, equally hospitable where two great friends of her sister's are concerned, not to say cornered by circumstances."

Here, it may be observed, that it was just as well for the peace of mind of the careless Aping-Ayres, that he was unaware of the erroneous depth of the conclusion, to which he had been carried, concerning Lady Marian Gray's supposed hospitality.

Happily, unaware of the complete error of his surmises, Aping-Ayres continued to indulge in rosy and glowing visions

of the great welcome that awaited them, pictures, which included a resplendent dinner, and, without question, drinks galore, an invitation to extend their holiday by several days, with ample board and lodging gratis, and a final triumphant leave-taking, before expending their final remaining scanty stock of gold upon, perhaps, one servant's tip, and the further purchase of two third-class singles to London.

All these happy visions, only serving to show how very far short of the truth were Aping-Ayres' happy conjectures, how bitterly they were destined to be crushed, later on, when realities became manifest.

Sharing for awhile the blissful ignorance of his companion, Reginaldo promptly sat up, abandoned the idea of slumber; and forthwith declared that his friend had the mind and resources of an Archangel. That he considered Roberto truly wonderful, and that if he, Reginaldo, had been likened to a weasel and a stoat, his friend Roberto was a wily, furry, wondrous fox, a being without parallel. "The very king of foxes, a majestic beast of the forest, whose equal there was not upon earth, or," added Reginaldo, proudly, but it must be confessed, vaguely, "the waters above the earth."

"Roberto, you have saved the situation," wound up Reginaldo, triumphantly. "I see before me a good dinner rising to my grateful nostrils like incense. I feel, trickling down my parched throat, rich, cooling drinks. I seem to stretch my languid limbs upon a dainty chintz bed, lavender scented, the prelude to a grateful sleep, bestowed upon me, as a last tribute to generous hospitality. An awakening in the morning to the sweet call of birds, to all the sounds and odours of the sweet countryside. A cold bath, culled from some rain-watered well, overhung with roses, showered direct from Heaven, but to serve as the prelude to another happy day, and others after that, each in its succeeding course, stealing the golden hours of sweet content. Roberto, you have saved my life," averred his grateful friend, "and, Roberto, let me in justice add, that I have discovered you to be possessed of something I never dreamed lurked within your sometimes superficial and careless nature. I refer, Roberto, to common sense. Give me thy grubby hand, honest heart, with which

thou hast been bestirring all the gritty earth, amidst the bracken by your side."

Roberto fervently shook the hand of his eulogistic friend, and continued to grin contentedly, amidst these high attributes so generously accorded to him.

"There is one great drawback," admitted Roberto, "we have really no idea where she lives, have we?"

"Of little consequence," admitted his friend, graciously. "It is yet barely the hour of a rural tea-time. Now to appear at that time would be injudicious from every point of view, would it not, Roberto?"

"Quite so," agreed Roberto. "My experience has taught me that it does not invariably include an invitation to stay to dinner."

"And," interrupted Reginaldo, "to appear about dinner-time can really only convey one impression."

"Two," giggled Roberto. "Two impressions, Reginaldo. You and I, both hungry, dusty, whimsical, irresistible, yet——"

"Yet imperative," mused Reginaldo. "Not to be lightly denied, and with our power of persuasiveness, eh?"

"It is as good as done," said his friend. "Now to find out where this providential lady resides; it ought not to be difficult."

"Why not?"

"Well, that truly delightful infant I christened Tinwhumpinny, or Tinwhumps, informed me that he lived in a bungalow house by the sea."

"Lovely visions of verandahs and cigars after dinner," murmured Reginaldo.

"And, if the said Tinwhumpinny, being, without all doubt, a quite remarkable little figure, even in London, I should imagine he must be absolutely startling by way of a contrasting character in a small country place. I shall therefore enquire for our small, but sagacious friend. We shall seek, and we shall find, believe me."

At that moment, the scraping of dragging feet could be heard approaching down the gritty road, leading to the dingle in which the friends were lying, conversing.

Through the interstices of the trees, the gaunt and ragged figure of a very dirty and utterly disreputable man, carrying a sack over his shoulder, could be seen advancing.

"An animated scare-crow approaches, unannounced," said Roberto. "I had a dim impression such agricultural phenomena were out of date."

Reginaldo leisurely raised himself upon one arm for a better view. "A horrible tramp, and, from his appearance, verminous," announced Reginaldo pompously. "I trust he will not consider it necessary to sit beside us, for the purpose of becoming friendly, otherwise I shall be compelled to move."

"A very vulture," whispered Roberto. "I like him not."

"A hateful person," agreed Reginaldo. "Ah, he spies us, he bears down upon us. Why! oh why!" questioned Reginaldo, mournfully, "does every village idiot, and every filthy tramp, immediately claim me as a brother? What fatal fascination have I about me, Roberto?" asked his friend, piteously, "that immediately attracts such creatures, even to the extent of their altering their course for miles, to be near me?"

The horrible-looking man approached them, until he stood at their feet. The man's big, remarkable eyes, seemed to leer at them from his diseased and horrible face, rendered all the more ghastly by a slanting streak of bright sunshine, that filtered through the branches overhead, lighting it up in all its odiousness.

In one furtive glance the man seemed to have taken in exactly who and what they were. Then he rasped out, in his deep twanging voice, "Ole cloes masters, bones, bones, ole cloes!" whilst he shifted the dirty sack from one shoulder to the other, the frousy odour, proceeding both from it and his garments, seemed to permeate the air, and mingle in most disagreeable companionship with the scent of the wild roses around them.

Reginaldo, before replying, carefully extracted his cambric handkerchief, which he himself had delicately and thoroughly perfumed that morning with Eau de Cologne, under the impression that it kept off gnats, and pressing this article carefully underneath his nostrils, as a sanitary precaution, regarded the visitor with anything but a good grace.

According to Reginaldo's view of life, cleanliness came even before godliness, and the sight of deep blue stubble, covering the man's evil face, seemed to point at least to the absence of either soap or razor, for a period of many days.

"Bones," chanted the man, in his low, horrible voice. "Any bones."

"The cemetery is further down the road," essayed Reginaldo, without relaxing in any way the fervent pressure of his handkerchief to his nose.

"Ole cloes," rasped the creature, on a deeper note. "I wait for old clothes."

"Do you suppose," ventured Aping-Ayres, with an aggrieved stare at the stranger, "that we have repaired into this dingle, for the express purpose of parting with our wardrobe? Furthermore, as you appear as one crying in the wilderness for *old* clothes, it is out of the question to suppose that the dusty, but otherwise quite fashionable garments, which cover our persons, can in any way answer the description of the raiment you are in search of."

The man seemed to listen, although he made, as yet, no reply to these remarks, save to shift the foul-smelling sack back from one tattered shoulder to the other.

"If," suggested Reginaldo, faintly, "you intend to remain and become chatty, could you without inconvenience, cease to wave that repulsively smelly receptacle. Kindly place it as far away as possible, it bears too many mingled reminiscences of——"

"Of my calling, eh?" croaked the man, as he placed the sack at some distance away upon the ground, and straightway folded himself upon it, a mixture of gaunt arms, straggling legs and long, hanging, greasy ringlets.

"I was about to observe, when you interrupted me," continued Reginaldo, "that it combines, in itself, the united unpleasantness of the dust-bin, the slaughter-house, and——"

"The pig-tub," vouchsafed Aping-Ayres, casting about for a rural simile. "Don't forget the pig-tub, Reginaldo."

"I am scarcely likely to," retorted Reginaldo, with a convulsive and renewed pressure of his handkerchief, "with such a living reminiscence of it before me,"

The man nodded his greasy head, slowly, in the direction, first of one, then of the other.

"You speak in the jargon of school and college," he replied, in the deep, twanging tones in which he always spoke. "I am not unacquainted with them. I have been to both."

"And you appear to have done them credit," lisped Aping-Ayres.

"You haven't gone through the world, master," droned the man, "without observing that there isn't room for every one to walk in the picked highways of life."

"No," croaked the creature. "Some have to walk in the gutter, and stay there, not room for everybody on the pavement. So the grand folk, those with money, and fine clothes, those with silks, satins and jewels, like to promenade gaily along, until, some for one reason, some for another, are pushed off the fair high road, aye, pushed off, into the gutter, the grimy greasy gutter, running always by their sides, which they pretend not to see. Then those who have waited in the gutter, who have been long covered with its dust, and its mire, and its filth, they get the first pick of the silk and the satin, the jewels and the lace. Bodies of men, still possessing rich things, come into their hands, and bodies of women, with all sorts of things, he, he, he," croaked the wretch. "Yes, to be sure, women as well."

"Your knowledge of the gutter seems to be as unpleasant as it is comprehensive," said Aping-Ayres.

"Why, yes," croaked the man, "from one end of the world to the other."

"I should scarcely have imagined that the odious calling was sufficiently lucrative to have warranted so long a journey," was the brief comment of Aping-Ayres.

"Now and then a jewel," cackled the man, with an evil grin, which partially exposed the long yellow fangs in his mouth, which did duty as teeth. "Yes, to be sure, in the dark gutter a pearl, and not always one—he—he—you get at once, but one which you mark, and return for, once marked, the waiting, and the watching, and the knowing just when it is going to fall into one's eager hands." Here the creature made

a gesture with his filthy claws, so suggestive, that Reginaldo positively shivered, preparatory to wriggling himself into a sitting posture in a remoter place, whence he gradually wandered further and further away from the unsavoury visitor, to all appearances engaged in the improving study of botany, at a safe distance.

"Whatever the old clothes man marks for his own, and wants," droned the man, "be assured he gets it in the end. Yes, yes, always; he only has to wait and watch. Old clothes, bones, don't always mean garments. No! no! *they mean the things other people have thrown away, the things people don't want. Unexpected things. Yes! Yes! Yes!*"

"I wonder," suggested the disgusted Aping-Ayres, "that you don't write an *autobiography*, it ought to be disgusting enough to command attention, and startling enough for fiction."

"Startling enough," chuckled the creature, "too startling for some people, it might produce a revolution."

"Let us hope so," agreed Aping-Ayres, "and that its chief result might be to put an end to a beastly, and quite unnecessary, calling."

"Not unnecessary, master," droned the man, "not unnecessary, for everything goes somewhere. There is always something, somewhere in the world, that somebody doesn't want."

"Which I should imagine," suggested Aping-Ayres, "must apply particularly to yourself."

"Quite so, master," grinned the tattered one. "Many people haven't wanted me, but that alters little. My father didn't want me."

"I am glad to see," observed Aping-Ayres, trenchantly, "that an evidence of good taste appeared in your family once, at any rate."

"He! He!" grinned the dealer in things that were not wanted, without, seemingly, taking any offence at the remark. "Yet nothing is wasted, the stalks of a cabbage find their way into the gutter, so, eventually, do the coverings of a Countess. Nothing is wasted, the son of a drunkard may be a genius."

"Or, most probably, another drunkard," opined Aping-Ayres.

"Yes," replied the man, a sudden grim and ghastly earnestness, such as he had not previously shown, appearing, for an instant, in his hawk-like eyes, "you are right, master. The process was reversed in my case, my father was a drunkard, who bequeathed the same legacy to me, and nothing else."

"Very interesting and probable," cooed Aping-Ayres.

"But his father," continued the vagrant, unabashed, "was a genius, who left a great name behind him, for all the world to wonder at. He, he, and nothing else besides, nothing else, neither money, land, or anything else, hence the process, out of nothing, nothing. Only me, he, he."

This philosophical reflection seemed to afford this sole and surviving example of the third generation considerable grim amusement, by the way he rubbed his horny and unspeakably dirty hands together, one over the other.

"Would it be injudicious to enquire the name of the ancestor whose meteoric appearance seems to have been productive of such poor results," asked Aping-Ayres, sarcastically.

"No," said the man, and sliding, stealthily, nearer Aping-Ayres, until his foetid breath, suggestive of past and ample potations of cheap brandy, seemed verily to beat upon him, corrupting the very atmosphere, he uttered the world-famous name of a great poet.

Appearing too scared even to repeat the almost sacred name, Aping-Ayres, seizing his bag, and scrambling to his feet, stood viewing the vagrant as if he had suddenly seen a ghost or a skeleton, which in all probability was correct, for if the vagrant's words were true, there must have been at least one hideous family skeleton present, of a very unpleasant nature.

"You are either mad, or dreaming," said Aping-Ayres, sternly, "or—or drunk," he added, as an afterthought.

"He! he!" grinned the wretch, as if he thoroughly enjoyed the joke. "I'm neither, master, neither. Yes, it's quite true. I'm the grandson—he—he—he—of one of the greatest poets the world has ever known, it's strange, isn't it?"

"Strange," almost yelled the demoralized Aping-Ayres, "it's

disgusting, it's immoral, it's——" then, as if all adequate expression utterly failed him, before the presence of such an outrageous phenomena, Aping-Ayres concluded—

"It's enough to make one turn atheist in the future, and sufficient, at present, to poison every living thing, the very flowers, for instance."

"He! he!" croaked the vagrant, "that's what the little boy, the curious little boy, with the wonderful eyes, said of me only yesterday."

"And he was a strangely good judge," vouchsafed Aping-Ayres, heartily.

"He! he!" droned the man, whilst an absent-minded expression came into his eyes, "he was a strange child altogether, him that stood amongst all the beautiful flowers round the bungalow house."

At mention of the bungalow house, Aping-Ayres appeared to become interested. "Where is this bungalow house you speak of?" he asked the man, quickly.

"Three and a half miles down the road there, past the sand dunes, by the sea."

"And you say a rather strange child lives there?"

"A very strange child, master, he! he! he!"

"Are you sure of the distance?" enquired Aping-Ayres, tersely. And it may be mentioned that Aping-Ayres took particular trouble to make the enquiry, since he felt convinced that he had unexpectedly found the very house, of which he and his friend Reginaldo were in search.

"Quite," answered the man. "I go there again myself later on to-night, after I have rested here a bit."

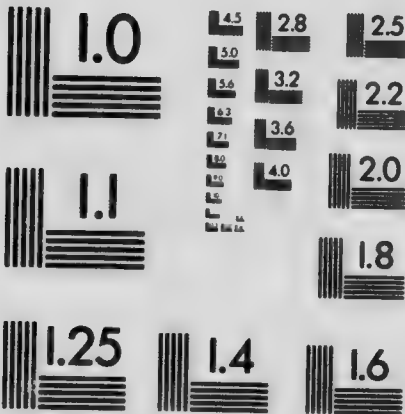
"Whatever for, in Heaven's name?" demanded Aping-Ayres.

"Old clothes!" answered the vagrant, enigmatically. "Old clothes—ha—ha—ha—old clothes!"



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CHAPTER VIII

THE READING OF THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE UNKNOWN

UPON their arrival at the bungalow house, the spirits of both Robert Aping-Ayres and Reginald Chambers suddenly dropped, as if by magic, to below zero.

Certainly, the bright aspect of the garden, overflowing with every description of summer flower, and the prettily-curtained, diamond-paned, latticed windows, had appeared most inviting, from the outside, had seemed, in fact, a very oasis to the dusty travellers after their long walk through endless lanes and hedges.

The bright countenance of Martha Cray, as she opened the door to them, her homely face wreathed in smiles of recognition, yet, with sundry secret and grave misgivings deep down in her heart as to what sort of reception these young gentlemen from London would receive at the hands of her mistress, had, for a brief moment, seemed to betoken possibilities of quite a warm welcome.

It was therefore remarkable, that the moment the two friends had been conducted across the cold-looking, square, tile-floored hall, and hence to a colder-looking room, that, for some reason or other, the spirits of both Mr. Aping-Ayres and Mr. Chambers received a sudden chill, not to say a shock.

Their fantastically gay mannerisms dropped from them, as if they were merely assumed garments. Without uttering a word, they gazed silently, and not without dismay, around the steel-blue, calcarium-washed walls of the room into which they had been ushered, when Martha had departed to announce their presence to her mistress.

Aping-Ayres inserted his eye-glass in order to stare coldly

upon a coloured illumination of the Lord's Prayer, almost unnecessarily enlarged, which, in company with two coloured texts, helped to relieve the monotony of one wall, whilst Reginald Chambers regarded, with amazement, a horticultural exhibition in waxwork, covered in glass shades, upon the mantelpiece.

The whole aspect of the room suggested rigorous and perpetual prayer and fasting, the immediate impression being considerably heightened by the literature arranged upon the book-shelves, which was, without exception, of a deeply religious character, consisting of endless sermons, handsomely bound in morocco calf, all contributed to a presumably thankful world by eminent low-church divines.

By way of an added cheerfulness, several quite gaily tinted tracts and booklets were scattered upon a small writing-table, which had more the appearance of a praying-stool.

The titles of these interesting fragments of literature were severally and respectively enlarged, by way of attraction, and the nature of their contents could not be always reassuring, since "The Day of Judgment" caught one's eyes, together with "The Fires of the Future," "Little Pillows," "Living Waters," and "The Fierce Furnace of Damnation."

Reginald Chambers, silent and speechless, viewed these interesting speculations of a future existence, and gulped down the feelings of emotion they evoked.

"Will you please come this way," announced Martha from the open door, with her usual cheerful smile.

The two friends, who felt as if they were on their way to the scaffold, hung their heads, and straightway followed Martha.

Upon entering the other room, Aping-Ayres received a momentary impression, that a sort of court-martial was taking place.

Four persons, three feminine and one masculine, were grouped, solemnly, in high-backed chairs, round a small table, in what was, evidently, upon other festive occasions a drawing-room.

A ponderous ecclesiastic, in uniform, appeared to be presiding, with papers in front of him, and did not rise at their entrance.

Two of the ladies, one short, thick-set, and with a very pale face, and very cold steely eyes, rose stiffly at their approach; as she did so, her action was echoed by a gaunt and very thin girl standing fully six feet, who endeavoured to wring from her lips a sort of smile.

This second lady unconsciously created the impression of a giraffe, who had suffered its features to momentarily relax into a snigger of amusement.

"Friends of my sister, Lady Argaffel, I believe," commenced the thick-set lady, icily.

Mr. Aping-Ayres and Mr. Chambers responded as heartily as their petrified condition would allow.

"Permit me to introduce you," continued the lady, with a stony stare, worthy of Medusa before her awakening. "My sister, Lady Janet," waving vaguely towards the other lady present, "and the Reverend Septimus Sneggs."

The reverend gentleman referred to glared wildly.

"Pray be seated," commanded the hostess, stiffly, "I am sorry your visit should take place in the midst of what I can only describe as a great family affliction."

"Dear me," ventured Aping-Ayres, solicitously. "Nobody ill, or dead, I trust."

"Spiritually dead, sir," snorted the Reverend Septimus.

"Er—afraid in that case, our visit is rather inopportune," drawled Mr. Chambers, in an undertone which would have done credit to an undertaker's foreman.

"On the contrary," said Lady Marian Gray "your appearance as friends of my sister may be able to throw some light on this family affliction, in which case, I can only call your visit most opportune."

"I have a small son," continued Lady Marian, "who is——"

"Absolutely delightful," declared Aping-Ayres heartily, and who felt that here, at any rate, he was upon what he believed to be, at least, safe ground. "Lady Marian, I congratulate you," proceeded Aping-Ayres, warmly, "he is a dear boy, in fact, really remarkable, we are quite great friends. I christened him Tinwhumpinny."

How much longer the genial Aping-Ayres would have

continued cannot be ascertained, for the unexpected effect produced upon everybody present (with the exception of Lady Janet, who smiled) by his innocent remarks, was, to say the least of it, disconcerting.

"The name of my son is Philip," interrupted Lady Marian, with what she intended to be a tone of knife-like sarcasm. "Philip, a name chosen from the gospel. The name you appear to have honoured him with sounds to me like that of a savage, or a heathen, and which, under the circumstances, seems to be singularly appropriate, I am ashamed to say. Your congratulations, sir, with regard to my unfortunate and misguided son, are, to say the least of it, premature. The presence here of the Reverend Septimus Sneggs is due to the awful fact that my son has just been expelled from school. A school for young gentlemen, and Christians, of which Mr. Septimus Sneggs is the honoured head."

"Numbering amidst its fold the sons of several eminent divines," groaned Mr. Sneggs, as if he was uttering responses to the Litany. "Shameful! Shameful! Shameful!"

"What is it all about?" enquired Aping-Ayres, with a great assumption of cheerfulness, which he was far from feeling. "What infant indiscretion has Tinwhumps been guilty of?"

"Would you kindly recollect the fact that my son is christened Philip, sir."

"Er—yes, er—Philip, of course," assented Aping-Ayres, blandly. "Can't be anything very serious, at his age, and bless my heart," continued the gentleman, smiling, "now I come to think of it, I was expelled myself from one school, for some stupid trick or other, wasn't I, Reginaldo?"

"Rather," grinned Reginaldo, "and I was expelled with you, don't you remember?"

"Of course," exclaimed Aping-Ayres, "we were both expelled together, weren't we? Lor, what a shindy there was about nothing. Yes," concluded Aping-Ayres, full of these happy reminiscences, "we were both expelled, right enough."

"I can well believe it, sir," snorted the Reverend Septimus.

"Perhaps, sir," observed Aping-Ayres (who was not a

person to be snubbed by any stranger whatsoever with impunity), "you are one of those whose belief can always accommodate itself to personal impressions, enhancing the value of both."

"I beg your pardon," stuttered the Reverend Septimus, who was unused to this mode of attack, "I beg your pardon, I did not—er."

"It's granted," said Aping-Ayres, coldly.

"You were saying, madam?" he asked, turning to Lady Marian.

"I was endeavouring to explain that my son, after being brought up most carefully at home, and in the fear of the Lord, and the ever-present sense of the Day of Judgment, has contrived, in some manner utterly inconceivable to me, possessing the firm faith that I do, to become possessed of the most pernicious ideas, dangerous and iniquitous in themselves, and utterly opposed to any one of his many careful Christian teachers.

"My son had, first of all, three tutors, all considered highly gifted. His advance was so rapid, for at times he appears to be intelligent, that I decided to send him to Chevester School, which is close handy, under the able Christian guidance of Mr. Septimus Sneggs, who is the head of that institution.

"Yesterday was the last day of the term, and each boy had to prepare, and most properly so, an essay, which each boy had either to read, or have read for him, in public, before the parents assembled. Something showing what progress he had made, what he had accomplished, and what he intended to accomplish. It had to be an original essay," sneered Lady Marian, pausing for breath.

"Knowing Tinwhum—I mean Philip," observed Aping-Ayres, "I should say, it was at least original."

"It was disgusting, sir," almost shouted the Reverend Septimus, who could contain himself no longer, and who was rapidly becoming purple in the face. "So disgusting, sir, so utterly unchristian-like in its deplorable blasphemy, that two Church of England clergymen, instantly gave notice for the removal of their sons. Two Methodist gentlemen, who were

actually contemplating sending their sons to my establishment in order to possibly broaden the views of their offspring, that they might not, through life, be accused of being too rigidly sectarian, two Methodists I say, sir, fainted. The commotion the reading of this disgraceful document caused was unparalleled at my public prize-day. The unfortunate master, whose misfortune it was to have to read it, during, I believe, the unavoidable absence of Master Philip Gray, was suffused in blushes, and stumbled disgracefully, as well he might, in the reading of such a degrading document, and finally collapsed, after it was finished, when several of the ladies present, unmindful of my confusion and deep distress, seized their unoffending children, and marched them from the building, never, I fear, to return.

"If anything could make such a state of affairs worse, two highly cultivated ladies of title, who were present to distribute the prizes, declined to believe that any boy could possibly have written such a document, and straightway accused the master, who had been sufficiently degraded by reading it aloud, of being the author of the manuscript. But for my strong defence, upon his behalf, this gentleman, who is almost in Society, if I may say so, and who is about to take his B.A., might have been ruined for life. I, therefore, at once rose and announced that Master Philip Gray would be dismissed from the school, and no longer be permitted to associate with the young gentlemen who were its scholars. This, in some measure restored peace, and after—I fear hastily—asking a blessing, the scene ended."

"Would it be permissible to read the contents, which the gentleman who was almost in Society found so overcoming?" asked Aping-Ayres, pointedly.

"I was hesitating, in shame, to read it when you came in, sir."

"As a critic, and as the son of a once-famous critic, now deceased, I should really like to form an opinion."

"A critic?" blustered the Reverend Septimus, "your name, again, I did not catch it."

"Robert Aping-Ayres," returned that gentleman, equably

"And was your father Mr. Murdoch Aping-Ayres, sir?"

"The same."

"I thought so," announced the Reverend Septimus, triumphantly. "He attempted to adversely criticize the Bible."

"I think," said Aping-Ayres, pointedly, "he did so because he found so many odd people appearing to agree with it."

"I cannot discuss him, sir," said the Reverend Septimus, loftily, "he has gone, sir."

"Yes," agreed Aping-Ayres, sweetly, "but his masterly treatise upon Pharisees remains, and its constant application to members of the Church is among one of my daily wonders."

The Reverend Septimus, having no immediate reply to vouchsafe to the remarks of Aping-Ayres, coughed once or twice, by way of comforting himself, and opening some sheets of an exercise book, clearly written, in a childish hand, glared round upon the company, as a preparatory warning, before starting to read Philip's offending composition.

The only person openly smiling, pleasantly, with a touch of shrewdness in the smile, was the Lady Janet.

To say he was inwardly smiling would not in any way describe the condition of Mr. Reginald Chambers. He sat in his chair, literally convulsed with an inward merriment he dare not give way to, or he would have rolled upon the floor, and shouted his mirth aloud. Neither dare that gentleman catch the eye of Aping-Ayres, otherwise he felt that his fortitude would utterly give way.

Mealie, the gaunt daughter of Lady Marian, little knowing in reality that she had been inwardly likened to a giraffe, being utterly unused to the society of good-looking young men, surreptitiously viewed the downcast eyes, and the bitten handkerchief of Mr. Chambers, with much satisfaction. To her unsophisticated mind they betokened that the youthful, good-looking actor was bashful in her presence, and Mealie simpered a sickly simper.

"If he should fall in love with me," sniggered Mealie. "Oh! yes," she thought to herself, "he won't raise his eyes, to see how I approve of him, nice fellow, he's shy, he can't look me in the face," which last reflection was undoubtedly correct.

Reginaldo could not, had he done so, he would have laughed outright.

Twice the Reverend Septimus attempted to clear his throat. Upon the third attempt, he appeared successful.

"The beautiful subject of this essay was 'Am I a child of God? My belief with regard to God. My belief with regard to Life.' When I first arranged this edifying subject, with its two earnest sub-titles, I did so, little dreaming that any child could have written such a travesty upon so sacred a theme. Lady Marian, have I your leave to commence?"

The lady thus questioned nodded assent, with the expression of a martyr about to receive red-hot irons.

Mealie attempted, most unsuccessfully, to look like a Madonna. Aping-Ayres boldly focussed his eye-glassed optic upon the reverend gentleman, as if it were a microscope upon some strange beetle.

Reginaldo choked in his chair, praying that he might have sufficient strength granted him to prevent his rolling upon the floor and shrieking.

Lady Janet continued her knitting, smiling and undisturbed. In fact, to tell the truth, Lady Janet had quietly made up her mind that she was going to be really entertained, and she was perfectly correct in her supposition.

Had any simple detail been needed to heighten the general ludicrous effect, it was amply supplied by the Reverend Septimus Sneggs himself, who read the strange little document in the same tones, presumably, which he employed to deliver the lessons in Church, and commenced to deliver himself, thus :

"The place in the centre of everybody's stomach, which singers call the diaphragm, where perhaps God left his thumb-mark, just to show that everything was good ; from the moment we all enter the world, has possibly a deep spiritual significance, whose more common domestic equivalent may be found in the way shepherds redden the sheep in their flock.

"The shepherd undoubtedly puts the same redden-mark upon all the sheep, without in the least pretending that all are equally good ; very likely the Almighty does the same.

"I, Tinwhumps, believe that I am a child of God, in the sense of being a sort of electrical receiver of the most infinite, perpetual, and subtle electricity, which is really the Spirit of God, manifested in me and through me, every second in which I live, transmitted through me again, to the world.

"I believe that God is not what a ridiculous person once described to me, when I was a little boy, a sort of stalking, punishing terror, clad like an Athenian god in a tiger skin, smashing everybody into submission, with a club.

"No, I, Tinwhumps, rather believe that God is a Spirit, dwelling in each tiny chalice of each flower of the field, present in the misty hollows of each cave. I, Tinwhumps, firmly believe in re-incarnation, but find it impossible, in common with all other people, to even surmise how many times I have been on this earth or another, before; but I know that I shall go on re-incarnating until I am able to move up or on to another psychic sphere. I, Tinwhumps, believe that the real and only tangible evidence we leave behind us of our existence, is our aura, which, although invisible, descends upon the world as a lasting heritage, symbolically—the mantle of Elijah *in perpetuo*. I, Tinwhumps, believe that there are upon this earth, a few rare beings, so spiritually pure that they exhale spirituality to such a degree, that the very flowers increase their perfume as they pass, because the vibrations between spiritual things is always in perfect unison, and greatly increased when spiritual things meet.

"I believe that round each of our heads is an aura, so that in either this world or another, it will be useless to dispute what we have been—the aura will tell.

"I believe that I have two brains, one in each knee, that I have a brain also in my head, another at the root of my tongue with which to speak, but the chiefest of all my brains is in my diaphragm. I have really yet one other thinking entity or brain, making six, but I am considered unconventional if I talk about it, so, to the world, by way of satisfying their prejudices, I say I have five busy, thinking brains, unless I were to meet and discuss it, with three people more sensible than anybody I have ever met, one of whom was a great musician, one a critic, and the other an actor, who would understand me

perfectly, without my saying any more, for they were dear, sensible things, devoid of all prejudices.

"I, Tinwhumps, freely forgive all the people in this world who consider that I am eccentric, not to use a stronger term, and who avoid me as if I were a plague. I believe that all Roman Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Wesleyans, Methodists, Presbyterians, Plymouth Brothers, Salvation Armies, Burning Bush Dancers, Christian Scientists, Buddhists, Mohammedans, Jews, Greek Church; and others styling themselves Atheists, Free Thinkers, and Agnostics are really and truly children of God, whatever they may think about it, and whatever their denomination may be. I also surmise that if they think too much about the form and manner of the temple, instead of the Spirit inside the temple, they might in a future state go to a Sphere called Ecclesiasticus, where the architecture and streets are narrow, fashioned after the curious thoughts of their own hearts. The mixed nature of the architecture of this Sphere must be appalling.

"I believe that by perfect thought, one can create out of oneself, a personality tending towards gradual perfection in other Spheres, which we vaguely call the next world.

"I believe that we can be intoxicated to our finger tips, with sense alone, and the longing to express it, which is the heritage of the artist. That if my being is indeed flooded with this sense, I am like a boy, bowling a hoop, in one great straight line, towards an horizon of infinite possibilities.

"For Art is to the world what the sun is to the earth. I believe this with my whole soul, so, although I know it is incorrect, I say, *Ars infinita, vita brevis*, because it sounds to me, more comprehensive.

"Feeling like this, cannot I talk or write, with all of me? Even as the missel thrush sings upon its briar bush, underneath my bedroom window?

"I, Tinwhumps, believe that when I pass on to the thing other people call death, I shall, in reality, only drop off my clothes, so to speak, like a little brown chrysalis does when it sheds the remains of its skin in some hedgerow, and becomes the gorgeous azure butterfly, whose wings are coloured with the blue of Heaven.

"The roses that may be around me will not fade nor fall, neither will their exquisite fragrance depart, for they will be *real* roses.

"The cup of wine given to me may be the draught of life, as the critic said, but it will no longer be able to harm either of us. For the perfection of anything cannot be measured by the delight we take in it.

"This is the sum and total of the belief that I, Tiawhumps, believe in."

The Reverend Septimus ceased to read.

Mr. Chambers had ceased even to desire to laugh, and what was stranger than all, Mr. Aping-Ayres blinked away two tears that, oddly enough, were standing in his eyes, for some reason, perhaps best known to himself.

"If, sir," began the Reverend Septimus Sneggs, turning to Aping-Ayres, "you are the critic which my late, misguided pupil refers to, I hope you are proud of the lesson you appear to have inculcated."

"Good heavens, man," said Aping-Ayres, sternly, "do you suppose I could have taught a child of thirteen, in the few minutes I have seen him, anything so beautiful and so wonderful? If anybody ever vindicated the right to be called a child of God, he has done so."

"I regret to say I consider you blasphemous, sir," stammered the Reverend Septimus.

"And I rejoice to say, sir, I consider you blind," retorted Aping-Ayres. "I congratulated Lady Marian, a short while ago, concerning her remarkable little son, I renew my congratulations to her, for I consider him a genius. I should have been proud to have written that essay myself."

"I believe you, sir," retorted the indignant clergyman.

"Your beliefs, fortunately, sir, neither affect me one way or the other."

"Lady Marian, my friend and I will bid you good evening."

"May I offer you a glass of weak whisky and water before you go?" enquired Lady Marian, hesitatingly.

"Thank you, madam," replied Aping-Ayres, "I never take it." Which remark was singularly true,

Mr. Chambers, struck anew with the ludicrousness of the situation, hastily converted a laugh into a sneeze, ere he made a graceful adieu.

"I regret, madam, I have not seen your little son," said Aping-Ayres.

"He is out at present, probably playing with the low children of fishermen," announced Lady Marian.

"Doubtless," added the Reverend Septimus, venomously, "demoralizing these ignorant fisher people with his own pernicious beliefs, and instilling in their minds ideas they have never heard before."

"Thereby, following, sir," concluded Aping-Ayres, turning as he reached the door, "the example of One, whose teachings most of us ignore."

With which parting shot, Aping-Ayres bowed to the company assembled, and made his exit, closing the door long before the Reverend Septimus Sneggs, or any one else present could frame a suitable reply.

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST BEAT OF THE DRUM

As soon as they had left the house, Reginald Chambers found that he no longer possessed an overwhelming inclination to laugh, as a matter of fact, he had not even an inclination to smile.

Without in the least knowing in which direction they were proceeding, or where a habitable inn was to be found, the two friends walked for some considerable distance in silence, which was at length broken in characteristic fashion by Aping-Ayres, from a high source commonly drawn upon at all times by both of them, should ever their own inspiration fail to supply sufficiently cryptic utterances, with regard to life.

"O Jephthah, Judge of Israel, what a treasure had'st thou," quoted Aping-Ayres.

"And hasn't even discovered it," bemoaned Reginaldo.

"Reginaldo," continued Aping-Ayres, "how singular it seems, that in seeking after any one definite object in life, one invariably encounters something or other one is never seeking for, yet which may be of enormous value. I have been strangely touched this evening."

Reginaldo, who had noticed his friend's emotion, for once in his life remained silent.

"Yes," remarked Aping-Ayres, "inexpressibly touched. Suddenly, a mirror has been held up to Nature, and, moreover, by the hand of a child, and Reginaldo, I do not like the picture of myself I saw upon the face of the mirror, before it was gently breathed upon, and the picture changed.

"Reginaldo, old friend, my one vice which, as you have so often told me, lies deep within the cup, suddenly assumed,

through the suggestion of a child, a new and strange shape, the leaves which crown the head of a Bacchanalian, are veritably the years which the locust has eaten, they are all stale and unprofitable. So, Reginaldo, although I shall always continue to drink cheerfully, I shall remember those words, 'where the cup can no longer do hurt to either of us,' and I shall not wait for a future existence to realize that. No, Reginaldo," continued Aping-Ayres, "I shall no longer continue to wear the crown of vine-leaves around my head, for days together. I have received a direct appeal, to arouse me from my sloth, a subtle message, which those people whom we have just left, with all their horrible, canting, religious phrases, could not find among them. I shall change a bit, Reginaldo. I, Roberto, shall cast off my little brown garments of debauchery and insensibility, even as the brown chrysalis does its skin in the hedgerows; it may take me a long time to find my wings," admitted Aping-Ayres, "my period of transition may be slow, and even wearisome, but it must be accomplished, Reginaldo, it must be accomplished."

For a second time, Reginaldo returned no answer. At heart, and in spite of all his affectations, Reginaldo was a thoroughly good fellow, and many and many a time he had secretly deplored the only failing he had ever been able to discover in his chosen friend. If even a partial regeneration was to be brought about, Reginaldo secretly rejoiced, not without great inward misgivings as to his own shortcomings, which were many and varied, extending, as Reginaldo ruefully admitted, in every direction.

However, being of a more volatile nature than his friend, and consequently, far less impressionable, he instantly dismissed any unpleasant suggestions which arose, as to his own reformation, from his mind, and returned to earth.

"The acrid scent of salt dried sea-weed in the air," said Reginaldo, "the laden odour of wild roses, commingling with it, alike steal over my senses, soothing them, despite the harrowing fact that I am a wanderer, travel-stained with dust, and, in reality most thirsty, yet there was an oasis in the desert we have left, one cup of water forsooth. I speak figuratively. That essay was wonderful."

"Wonderful?" questioned Aping-Ayres, "it was more, it was sublime, and ye Gods! written by a child."

"I think he's a genius," said Reginaldo, tentatively.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Aping-Ayres, heartily, "and one day, unless something happens to stifle him, he will be a very great poet; or a great writer; I feel it, I know it."

"Or perhaps with his curiously allied religious tendencies, he might revolutionize the Church."

"Heaven forbid," piously ejaculated Aping-Ayres, "surely that comprehensive machinery, grinding out all denominations, has mangled enough saints, martyrs, prophets and visionaries, in its time without yearning to immolate upon its creaking rack one strange wildflower, that will surely blossom into poetry."

"Humph," mused Reginaldo, "even the Church, I believe has its prose poets. I refer especially to an early Italian saint, to say nothing of a modern English cardinal."

"No, no, Reginaldo," hastily interposed Aping-Ayres. "When Aaron's rod blossoms, the flowers of it are unmistakable flowers, very pure, very spiritual, their petals are fashioned after the manner of old-world things, their shape and form and perfume, refined, and restricted to the surroundings amidst which they bloomed into perfection. If the purest chalices of the flowers so grown were indeed watered by the dew from heaven, they were, in addition, almost choked by the heavy incense sprayed around them, and perpetually threatened by the weight of the golden wand from which they sprung."

"The wild flowers of the poet's mind, even if they grow unseen and unrestrained, are the tiny, starry petals circumscribed by nothing, save the dome of Heaven above, and nothing to fear in companionship but the little stray brothers of their kind, who nod across the other spaces to them. Little jewelled patches, Reginaldo, they are so different to everything else, and they unfold their beauty quite alone."

"Yes," assented Reginaldo, "quite alone, as you say, and, most appropriately, here is one of them; don't you see, Roberto, who is coming down the lane?"

"By Jove! it's Tinwhumps," shouted Aping-Ayres.

"Tinwhumpinny, Tinwhumpinny," chanted Aping-Ayres

and Reginald Chambers, sonorously. "Oh! Tinwhumps, whither go you?"

Philip ran along the lane to meet them, holding out both his hands in joyful and unexpected welcome to his two London friends.

It was a matter of considerable difficulty to shake hands with Philip, since each grubby paw was full of wild flowers, not to mention a few outstanding brambles, but the gladness of the welcome was not lessened upon this account.

"However did you get here?" asked Philip.

"We came upon a state visit to you," announced Aping-Ayres, solemnly.

"Oh, I'm so very sorry, and I was out, but why didn't you——" then Philip suddenly broke off, as if he couldn't very well finish what he had to say.

"We weren't able to stay," interrupted Aping-Ayres, tactfully, "but, I say, Master Tinwhumps, you are in for a row, you know."

"Oh," said Philip, "well, I very often am, you know."

"May as well prepare you for the reception you are likely to get, Tinwhumps," volunteered Reginaldo. "I fancy it will be cold, yes, I may say very cold."

Philip did not answer immediately, perhaps he would not have had to tax his memory very much to remember many other receptions of a similar nature.

He looked at one friend, then at the other. "Why?" he asked.

"Well, you see," explained Aping-Ayres, with a good-humoured smile, "you are expelled from school."

"Expelled?" asked Philip, vaguely, "what for, what have I done?"

"Oh, much less than I or Reginaldo ever did," Aping-Ayres hastened to add. "Tinwhumps, I regret to disclose to you the painful fact that both Reginaldo and I were expelled, in deep disgrace, for rank insubordination."

"Wasn't it rank insubordination, Reginaldo?" enquired Aping-Ayres, with a note of triumph, not, perhaps, best fitting the recollection.

"Rather," heartily agreed Reginaldo. "Both of us

expelled, yet we made a dignified exit, if I remember it correctly, Tinwhumps. And you're expelled, for a dead cert."

"Well, I shall be in good company," said Philip, yet with a rather troubled smile. "What—what is it supposed to be for, in my case?"

"You wrote an essay for the prize-day," commenced Reginaldo.

"But we all wrote essays," answered Philip, blankly.

"Yes—yes, my dear little Tinwhumps," cried Aping-Ayres, "but your essay was—well, it was different from all the others."

"But, surely, you wouldn't have it the *same* as all the others?" asked Philip, reproachfully.

"No, I wouldn't, personally," hastily explained Aping-Ayres. "I thought it was a beautiful essay, myself."

"I am glad you liked it," said Philip, "very glad, but how could you possibly have read it?"

"They were reading it aloud, in the bosom of your family assembled, before we left, very much like a——"

"Last testament," suggested Philip.

"Something like that," agreed the two friends, trying to repress a grin.

"And what did they say?"

"Well, all sorts of things. I rather fancy that Mr. Sneggs said the most."

"I wish I had been there," remarked Philip, unexpectedly.

"Whatever for?" gasped the astonished Aping-Ayres.

"Well, as I seem to have explained to everybody's satisfaction that I am not a child of God, I should like to have heard the sentence."

"We took our departure, warmly defending you," asserted Aping-Ayres. "Oh, Tinwhumps, I told you, at The Towers, you were destined to beat a drum, but I didn't dream that you were going to start at once; but, having started the process, if you want to beat the drum, do so upon every occasion in spite of everybody. As for your *not* being a child of God, Tinwhumps, well, I consider you are as near to being so as anybody I have ever met, and listen, Tinwhumps, if ever you make things a trifle too uncomfortable for yourself, by the

drum-beating, and determine to seek more congenial surroundings for your solo performances, remember this: 107, Church Street, Chelsea, in London, quite close to The Towers, will always find me."

"And me," interposed Reginaldo.

"I am not so sure," objected Aping-Ayres, "the presence of your creditors often occasions a more or less prolonged absence."

"True," murmured Reginaldo, regretfully.

"Anyway, it will always find one of us. Will you remember, Tinwhumps?"

"I shall remember," said Philip, "but do you think," he asked, anxiously, "they are likely to send me away from home, just because I get expelled for writing an essay?"

"Lor bless your soul, no," answered Aping-Ayres, "but I think that event may take place later on perhaps."

"There are some people in the world nearly always alone. Tinwhumps," remarked Aping-Ayres, wistfully.

"I know," nodded Philip, "Adolf Zorowitch said that."

"Ah, and he is a great artist," sighed Aping-Ayres, "and each great artist must be a sort of Ishmael in the desert; amongst the majority of his fellows."

"Yes," said Philip, "but perhaps even Ishmael had his consolation in the desert; he might have had."

Aping-Ayres exchanged glances with Reginald Chambers, but Philip was not heeding them, he was looking at the wild flowers he held in his hands.

"And now, Tinwhumps, we must push on. Where is the nearest inn?"

"Three miles down the road, over the sand hills," replied Philip. "Oh, but I wish," he added, in a childish outburst, "that you had both been stopping at the bungalow; but, perhaps——" Philip paused instinctively, and, although he could not say so, he realized that neither Aping-Ayres or Reginald Chambers would have really been happy, had they even been asked to do so.

"I don't think," said Philip, "there is any wine in that inn," and his childish face broke into a smile, as he looked at Aping-Ayres.

"I don't care if there isn't, Tinwhumps."

"But I thought you said it was the joy of life."

"I say a good many preposterously silly things, Tinwhumps, which are not always true," confessed Aping-Ayres, "there is a greater joy in life—thoughts, Tinwhumps, beautiful thoughts, and the power to express them."

"Anyway," said Philip, consolingly, "they sell beer there."

"Then I shall have a small tankard of beer for supper, Tinwhumps, with bread and cheese."

"So shall I," echoed Reginaldo. "Beer and bread and cheese, goodness alive, it makes me ravenous to think of it."

"I wish I was going to have supper with you," said Philip, rather regretfully.

"So you shall, and many a time, when you come to London."

"Good-bye," said Philip, and the two friends watched him going down the lane, out of sight, in the twilight, until he turned at the end, and waved the wild flowers to them he carried in his hands.

Aping-Ayres little thought how his words would come true, and how many suppers Philip was to partake of, with them, in the future; neither did Aping-Ayres know that he would never see Philip's earnest little face ever quite the same again, as he had known it.

Could either of those worthy and good-hearted fellows have seen the far-reaching consequences, attendant upon that night, and its future events, it is doubtful if they would have taken leave of their little friend as cheerfully as they did, unconscious, as we must always be, of impending harm, and ignorant of the long issues which hang upon the trivial happenings of life.

CHAPTER X

AN EVENING AT "THE HAPPY TRAVELLERS"

UPON the arrival of the two friends at the wayside inn, which was most inappropriately named "The Happy Travellers," Reginaldo saw fit to find grave fault with everything.

The worthy landlord believed that the two gentlemen, judging from their important manner, must be noblemen, or, at the very least, two officers, who were compelled to pass the night under his roof.

Reginaldo, in his most pious manner, demanded what there was to eat.

Upon being informed by the landlord that country ham and eggs were the best things he had, Reginaldo declared he considered them the worst.

"What were the rooms like?" demanded Reginaldo, marching upstairs with the stride of an Emperor about to take possession of a captured citadel.

The landlord, showing the rooms with modest pride, was shocked to hear the gentleman considered them stuffy. However, the landlord, wishing to propitiate two such impressive customers, continued to make the best of everything, in proportion to the determined manner in which Reginaldo made the worst of them.

Finding Aping-Ayres peacefully smoking in the flagstone floor apartment, that did duty for the coffee-room, peacefully entertaining cheering thoughts of ham and eggs and beer to come, and furthermore, upon finding that gentleman was oblivious to the many discomforts which he, Reginaldo, had so successfully discovered, the discontented one was forced to

seek solace in such books and periodicals as the place afforded.

These consisted of a daily paper a week old, two railway guides, a guide to the district and, last of all, a somewhat worn and ancient copy of "Debrett's Peerage."

A low, but prolonged, whistle of astonishment sufficed to attract Aping-Ayres' attention to the volume, which his friend was perusing, with every sign of amazement.

"Good heavens," at length ejaculated Reginaldo, "did you know that little Philip Gray is the heir of the Earl of Wellminster? Inherits all his money and property, and that one of his titles will descend to him; and upon one former occasion, letters patent were granted for a daughter's male issue to inherit the principal title itself?"

"He was the heir," returned Aping-Ayres, "but the Earl of Wellminster has a son of his own now, Tinwhumps is no longer the direct heir; that is an old Debrett you are looking at."

To say that Reginaldo was looking at the book he held, was scarcely a correct definition. He appeared to be staring at it as if he had never seen or heard of the volume in his life before.

"Why should the book be opened at this place?" he asked, "and why is it marked, all round the passage about little Philip Gray, with unutterably filthy finger marks, and, faugh! upon my soul, it smells damnably."

Again Reginaldo held the offending volume beneath his nose and sniffed it, with an air of most important consideration.

"Filthy," commented Reginaldo, "it smells exactly like the sack of that old-clothes man we had the misfortune to encounter to-day."

As the landlord appeared at this moment, to encourage his guests by announcing their meal was nearly ready, Reginaldo pounced upon him.

"Landlord."

"Yes, sir."

"What filthy person has been recently examining this book?"

"What book, sir?"

"The book, landlord, which contains the particulars of the British peers, a book not to be lightly taken in hand by the dirty and the ignorant."

The landlord, who was more than ever convinced that his guest was a person of title, who had come to "The Happy Travellers" for the sole purpose of looking up his own pedigree, replied that he could not imagine who the profane individual could be.

"You see these disgusting finger marks?" asked Reginaldo, loftily.

"Yes, sir, I see 'em."

"Smell the book," ordered Reginaldo, in the tone of the presiding inspector in a police court, who was about to administer the oath.

The landlord sniffed the offending volume.

"It do smell a bit, sir, don't it?" he was forced to acknowledge.

"Smell a bit?" demanded Reginaldo, haughtily. "It reeks, sir."

"Why, now you come to mention it, sir, there was a dirty ragged man come 'ere, sir, as sat down in this 'ere coffee-room, an' ordered brandy and wate."

"How dare you admit him," stormed Reginaldo, "into the very room where I am to have my supper?"

"Well, sir, I couldn't deny him, if he paid."

"Had he a sack?" almost shouted the indignant Mr. Chambers.

"Yes, sir."

"I knew it," raved Reginaldo, "a beastly, verminous tramp, who has even left the remains of the filthy stench he carries through life with him upon this unoffending book, the only contemporary record you possess of the aristocracy. How dare you admit him? How dare he read it? Where do you keep the carbolic?"

"The carbolic, sir, in the wash-house, sir."

"Bring it instantly," commanded Reginaldo, "bring it, I say, and purify the floor, and the chair the thing sat in—no, upon second thoughts, put the chair out in the open air."

"Yes, sir, yes; but I don't know which chair he sat in."

"What!" roared Reginaldo, "you don't even know the infected chair? Then wash them all, the place must be swarming."

"With what, sir?"

"Everything! Every living thing, sir, that crawls. Have some hot water .aken up to my room immediately. I must purify myself at once," continued Reginaldo, excitedly. "My hands, about which I am most particular, have actually touched the contaminating surfaces of this germ-containing paper, which that accursed creature's diseased talons have fingered. Quick, things in my room, at once."

"Yes, sir, yes, I'll get them all directly," muttered the bewildered landlord, "but the ham and eggs, sir, they are nearly done, sir."

"Then do some more," commanded Reginaldo, "and do not expect me to touch anything until I am thoroughly purified," and with a wave of his hand, effectually forbidding anything in the nature of further argument, the highly indignant Reginaldo marched from the room, doubtless in order to lose no further time in carrying out his projects for immediate purification.

After his friend had departed, like a whirlwind, Aping-Ayres walked across the coffee-room, and looked at the paragraph in the book, which concerned Philip and his family.

There could be no doubt that somebody with exceedingly dirty hands had recently thumbed the particular paragraph, for the black, greasy imprints were smudged around that paragraph, and no other.

"Now, I wonder," pondered Aping-Ayres, "why that filthy old-clothes man should have been interested in Debrett generally, Philip in particular, and yes, by jove, of course, I remember now, he said he was going to the bungalow house, on business."

In spite of himself, Aping-Ayres shivered slightly. It was only for a second, the next moment he thought of Philip, and smiled. Of course, it was only coincidence, he argued, it could not possibly be anything else.

Any further thoughts Aping-Ayres might have entertained upon the subject were put to flight by the entrance of the landlord, with supper, closely followed by Reginaldo, reeking of Eau de Cologne, and confusing the landlord with countless directions concerning the coffee, and cigar to follow, neither of which commodities the landlord happened to have in the house, and the lack of which he acknowledged, with much self-abasement.

It was, therefore, in a state bordering upon frenzy, that Reginaldo sat down to supper.

"I shall take my cold bath precisely at eight o'clock, landlord," were Mr. Chambers' parting words, as the landlord was about to withdraw.

"There isn't a bath, sir, I'm afraid."

"I was certain of it," groaned Reginaldo, as he carefully wiped his knife and fork with a dinner napkin before condescending to eat. "I knew there would be no bath, no means of morning grace, no purification of the body, no refreshing influence, to lighten the labours of another day."

"I'm afraid, sir, —"

"Yes, sir, afraid of washing, don't speak further of it, don't distress me, I cannot be further distressed before I eat. Make the only atonement in your power, and, by eight o'clock to-morrow, find me a tub, a cistern, a can, anything that I can thoroughly cleanse myself in. I fear the district cannot be completely healthy whilst horrible vagrants amble through it unrestrained. I cannot run the risk of microbes, bacilli, or other harmful influences. Some sort of bath, therefore, without any further questions, precisely at eight o'clock."

"Good night, landlord, and I hope these eggs were ushered into the world at sunrise to-day, by one of the feathered flock you support outside your most inadequately named hostelry, and I also trust the ham may neither be tough nor salt. Not another word, I shall find out the exact truth concerning each of them, and will communicate them to you in the morning."

"Lord, how that there gent does go on," muttered the landlord, as he retired, he must be a very grand gent, and lots of money, to be so particular, as he is."

"Roberto," implored Reginaldo, when the landlord had departed, "have we enough money to see us through?"

"Only just enough," replied Aping-Ayres.

"How about your beer bill," enquired his friend Reginaldo insinuatingly.

"I am only going to have one tankard," replied Roberto.

Reginaldo made no comment whatever, by way of reply, but he remained thoughtful for some considerable time.

CHAPTER XI

ONE POSSESSED OF A DEVIL

THE trailing brambles, hedgerows, and wild ferns, amidst which a child's feet wander in the countryside, are not really one whit less wonderful than the delicate spirals and branches of the child's own thoughts, if one were only able to hear them, which unfortunately one never does, nor if one could only translate them, which one is never able to do.

The wonderful little starry wild flowers, which are so many scattered and perfect little gems, glistening in jewelled perfection, are in reality not more flower-like and perfect than the thoughts, the fancies, and the ideals of a child, whose intelligence can actually create beautiful things, concerning which very few have ever attempted to keep a record.

One, whose exquisite Motherhood is a type and symbol throughout the whole world, certainly kept all the sayings and doings of her Son in her heart. Not infrequently, some great writer has attempted to give to the world a child's thoughts, with the delicacy of the bloom still upon it. For the remainder it must be acknowledged, not without tears, a straggling, wistful multitude of little forms, trying to express cyphers, of which no one possesses the key, or, possessing it, never takes the trouble to use. Little Symbols which come from No Man's Land, and wander in No Man's Land, until each one is only too often slapped, and shaped, and cut and trimmed, and pressed and jostled, regardless of all personal feelings or thoughts or aspirations, into Somebody's Land, where the soil is, alas! too often injurious to their growth, and impossible to either thrive in or to flourish.

Philip, unlike a good many other children left entirely to their own resources, did not roam fancy free in thought, among medieval castles, and dragons, and knights in armour, wounded maidens, blood-splashed battle-axes, and things of such like grizzly nature.

Neither, it must be confessed, did he have wild yearnings towards Red Indians, buffaloes, or the fascinating tomahawk. Highwaymen of the past, and their methods, never even stirred him, and if he possessed a twinkling sense of amusement concerning fairies, it was probably due to the fact that he believed in a great deal which he did not see, and most likely considered it quite possible that there might be other wandering ones, like himself, who were part and parcel of nature herself, and whose wisdom, in always hiding themselves and their works, appealed to his intelligence, in a world which was unpropitious, not to say unsympathetic, towards anything in the very least degree fantastic.

There was no doubt that Philip's mind ran mostly upon art, upon nature, and upon religion, albeit, not the religion ordinarily taught in schools.

To all of these things he applied only the people whom he had met, and what was more important, remembered.

Then, through the curious woof of a child's mind, he would try to find the path they had found, for himself.

Then he would wonder if it was possible for him to follow in the wonderful flower wood which Adolf Zorowitch had explored, and had penetrated so far. More wonderful than any fairy castle, or fiery dragon, were his perpetual and searching speculations as to what the interior of the famous musician's palace abroad could be like.

Undoubtedly, that worthy and talented man would have been astonished to learn that little Philip thought far more about his palace home, than the musician did himself. And it is reasonable to suppose that his amazement would have been considerably heightened, could he have known how very nearly Philip had reconstructed, in his mind, the entire interior of his artistic edifice.

Analysis, of a kind, was decidedly not absent in Philip's mind either, since he decided that Adolf Zorowitch was very

great, but that Mr. Aping-Ayres and Mr. Chambers were brilliant.

"Of course," reasoned Philip, "it is very fascinating to be simply brilliant and clever, and they are my very dear friends and surely no one could ever become tired of them, but yet, to be the greatest of all is really best, and Adolf Zorowitch would be a wonderful friend also, far more than a friend," Philip felt sure—"a teacher, a guide, holding a torch for others, like me," thought Philip, "so that one could see the difficult way better, through the strange wood, which he had explored so well."

Philip thought of all this upon his way home that evening, and lastly, he dreamily considered how beautiful it would be, if he had the good fortune to be brought up amongst such people. People who understood all your thoughts, people who claimed you as one of themselves, people who never sneered, or scolded, or repressed, or punished; but people who guided and cheered, who laughed and listened, who sympathized and loved.

The working of Philip's mind stopped at the word "loved." The child had never considered the word particularly, save in the abstract, now, all at once, it seemed to become startlingly clear and to have a new significance.

Love meant all things of the world one liked and desired most, the things one was not supposed to ask for, and which one was never allowed to have.

Art, that was surely a thing to love, yet all the people immediately surrounding him sneered at that. Your own thoughts, yet everybody hushed you down, and scolded you, and shouted aloud that it was the wrong thing. Your own friends, yet, his friends, who were the fisher boys and girls, were called common and vulgar, and he must not mix with them, and when he disobeyed, he did so with a sort of stealth, yet, for his own part, openly, even when he knew he would be punished, otherwise he would have been ashamed. Then, the greatest friends of all, Zorowitch, Ayres, Chambers, they were decidedly uncommon, and yet they were no more welcome than his other, humbler friends. Why was this? Was nothing that one loved, liked, or admired ever to be tolerated?

Philip, in his innermost thoughts, could not imagine any of these people happy, for one moment, in his home. Lastly, and by a natural sequence, came the thought, was he happy himself, and if he was not, why was it? Was it ingratitude upon his own part, or was it the old indifference upon the part of other people? The great musician had not been indifferent, neither Mr. Ayres nor Mr. Chambers had been indifferent, they had all understood him, better than any one he had ever met.

"I wish I had been Adolf Zorowitch's son," thought little Philip, by way of a stray last thought, as he approached the house.

Philip little knew that the great musician and his wife had anticipated his thought, and that the offer to adopt him was at that moment locked inside a desk within the house that he was approaching.

The hanging lamp had been lighted in the hall, but the rest of the house was in darkness, so Philip went in at the side gate in the garden, and entered the door at the back of the bungalow house.

The house seemed empty as he entered, and Philip thought his mother, and aunt, and sister, and Martha, must have all gone for a walk. With regard to his aunt and sister, his surmise was correct, for Mealie, quite overcome by the rare presence of two fashionable gentlemen from London, had felt so romantically inclined, that she had induced Aunt Janet to roam with her, into the night. The good Martha, who had, during the entire day, been fairly scolded out of her seven senses, was likewise out, and airing her indignation down in the kitchen garden.

As Philip approached the hall, he heard the murmur of two voices, talking hurriedly, and in low tones. The hard, sharp tones of one he recognized as his mother's voice. Before he reached the hall, out of the darkness, the sound of the other voice caused Philip a sudden shock. Surely he had heard those horrible twanging tones before. What could be the meaning of it? and with a faltering step, he entered the square tiled hall, at its darkest end, leading from Martha's kitchen.

Fear and trembling came over him, for no particular reason,

and he could scarcely believe the evidence of his eyes, as he saw the horrible form of the old-clothes man, inside the house, one filthy, claw-like hand was outstretched for a moment, and there passed the glitter and the chink of gold. Too astonished to speak a word, Philip watched his mother actually give this awful-looking man, whose very appearance he dreaded, gold, a lot of gold it seemed to be ; then she pushed the shuffling, dirty creature towards the open front door, and slammed it behind the man.

She seemed to crouch and listen, whilst his footsteps shuffled away, and Philip noticed that in her hand she grasped convulsively, as if for protection, the stout elm stick, which Philip recognized ; the one which the Reverend Septimus Sneggs usually walked abroad with, and which he had doubtless left behind him upon this occasion, owing to mental agitation consequent upon his visit.

As she turned from the door, she saw Philip standing before her in the hall.

For one moment Philip could hardly believe it could be his mother, for a horrible transformation had come over her countenance that Philip had never seen before. Her face was white and puffy, her green eyes glittered and blazed like those of some mad animal, as she stood her whole body seemed to sway whilst she clutched the stick with a suggestion of terrible strength.

Horried and startled, Philip could only gasp out, "Mother, what is the matter? Are you ill? Mother, why was that horrible man here? What did he want?"

There was no answer to the boy's questions. The mad-looking eyes only seemed to stare at him.

"Mother, won't you speak to me?"

Still that horrible look upon his mother's face, and still she continued to glare at him.

Then the curious child mind remembered that he, Philip, was in disgrace. He had been expelled from school, he had forgotten all about the ill-fated essay, and his mother was enraged with him, of course ; he knew she would be very angry with him, but Philip had not expected anything like this.

"Mother," he commenced, "I am so sorry, when I wrote that essay I didn't know there would be such a lot of trouble over it, I——"

Two words came between her clenched teeth, like a hiss. "You—You——"

"I am sorry about being expelled, and when I wrote about being a child of God——"

The only answer was a hideous, hysterical laugh, which chilled even little Philip's stout heart.

"A child of God, curse you," rasped a hoarse voice, which Philip would never have recognized anywhere as his mother's.

"A child of God. You—a child of the Devil!" Then she raised the stick she held, and smashed it, again and again, across the upturned earnest little face in front of her.

With a wild piteous cry of anguish, little Philip groped, vainly with his hands, to ward off those awful blows; then he fell, like a log, underneath the lamp in the hall.

The agony of the childish cry brought Martha in from the front garden with a run.

With her ruddy cheeks flaming a deeper scarlet from anger, Martha confronted her mistress.

"You fiend," stuttered the honest countrywoman.

"Leave the house," commanded her mistress, thickly; then she raised the stick to strike Martha.

Martha wrenched the stick from her mistress's grasp, and, thick as it was, broke it across and flung it away.

"Will you leave the house, or shall I——"

Martha held the hand her mistress lifted to strike her in an iron grip, and looking full in the blazing, bloodshot eyes of the other woman, uttered one sentence—

"Go back to your dressing-case and your bottles, you she-devil."

"Then Martha leant over the silent prostrate form of little Philip, and lifting him in her strong arms, bore him upstairs to her own room, and tended him with motherly care, and wept bitterly as she tried to stanch the blood.

Philip was insensible, and Martha wept more bitterly than ever when she saw that his nose had been shattered, and the

childish beauty of his face she had loved so well had been destroyed.

Mealie was destined to receive a shock upon her return that evening, when she had to half lead, half force, a wandering, white-faced, incoherent woman to her bedroom.

Aunt Janet also received a double shock, for, in addition to witnessing these things, she was told that the moaning, restless voice, which sounded through the bungalow house, was that of a child in delirium. There was no doctor to be had in the place, so Aunt Janet resumed her bonnet and cloak, and tramped five miles for the purpose of getting one, which was, perhaps, the most sensible thing she had ever done in her life.

There was one other being who seemed to be considerably agitated, if outward appearances can in any way be said to indicate the state of the mind.

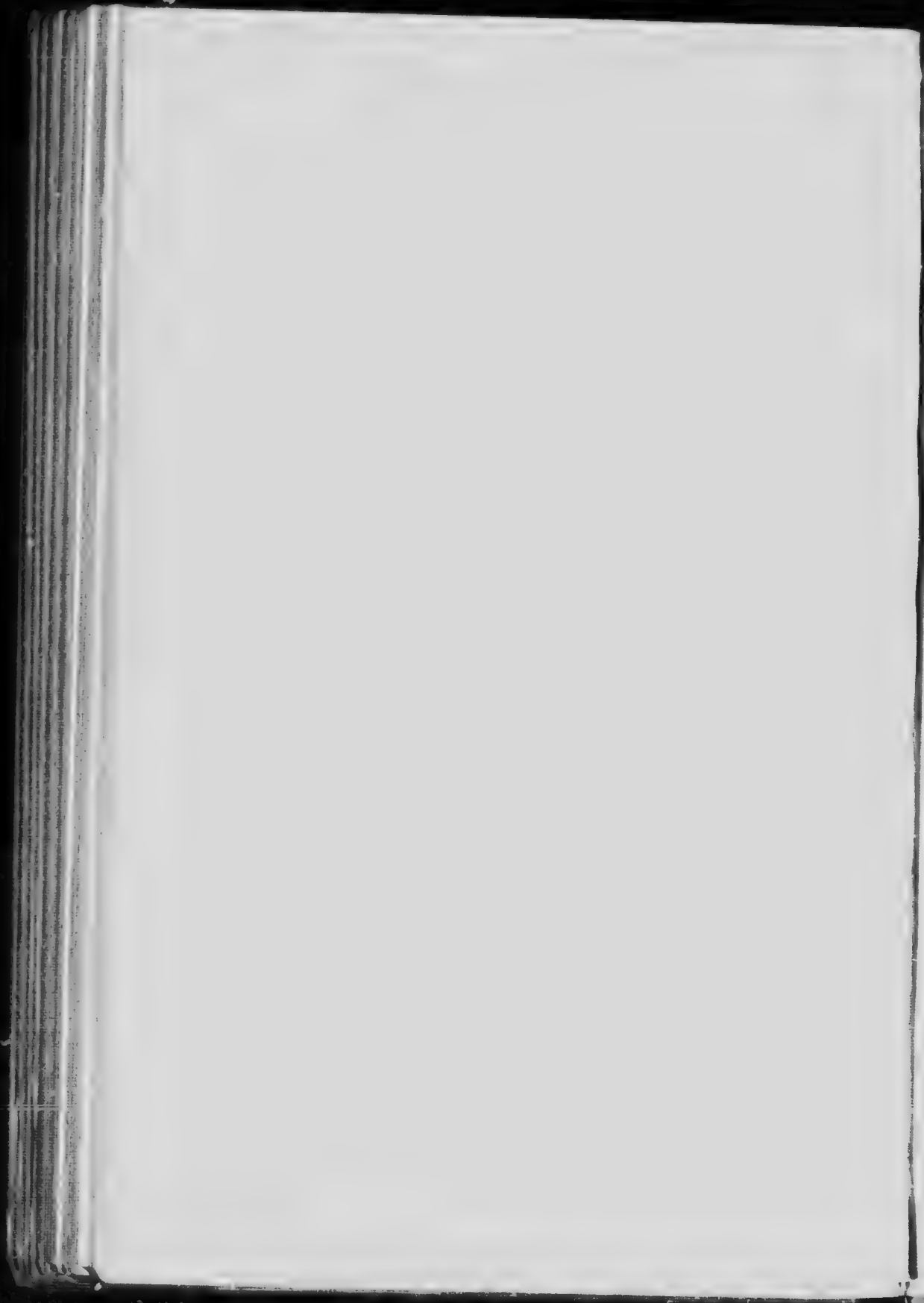
A tattered figure, with filthy ragged garments, blowing out in the night wind, was half shuffling, half running over the stretches of sandhills which lined the coast.

It seemed as if the very night had sent forth the actual embodiment of some particularly evil spirit clad in loathsome rags, to perpetrate some strange and unknown rite.

The thing chuckled and gurgled hoarsely, it lifted its grizzly, bony claws towards the night sky, in grotesque gestures of ecstasy. From time to time, the thing broke into a cracked and hideous laugh, then it seemed to weep, and so it passed away out of the night, like an unholy thing.

Only a twanging, hollow voice called out, from time to time, the words—"Old clothes! Old clothes!"

BOOK II
DAYS IN CHELSEA



CHAPTER XII

UPON ENTERTAINING AN ANGEL UNAWARES

MR. ROBERT APING-AYRES toyed with the meal upon a tray which did duty for his breakfast, with only the apology for an appetite, whilst he sipped the luke-warm tea, which was his morning portion, thirstily, yet without any other manifested sign of interest.

Aping-Ayres was sorrowfully conscious of the fact that, for the space of some three weeks, he had seldom been quite sober during the day, and never by any chance, anywhere near sober at night. A pile of unopened newspapers, still folded in the state of virgin freshness wherein they had been delivered from the news-agents, bore silent testimony to the fact that Aping-Ayres had not been even cognizant of current events for some time past. Possibly, his incessant devotion to Bacchus had enabled him to live without the aid of these more or less fictitious journals.

The one thing unfolded beside the breakfast-tray was an official-looking letter, at which Aping-Ayres gazed somewhat cynically through his single eye-glass. The letter, although courteously worded to the point of fastidiousness, informed Mr. Ayres that his services, as chief dramatic critic for a certain famous London paper, had been dispensed with.

Growing rumours that Aping-Ayres devoted most of his critical faculties to the bar, and but an indifferent attention to the drama itself, were given among other reasons, for a sudden change of policy, by the famous editor whose hobby-horse was total abstinence.

A cheque for fifty pounds due to Mr. Ayres for services up to date, etc., etc., was enclosed.

"I don't believe," mused Aping-Ayres, critically, as he perused the document in question, "that he ever obtained sufficient courage to write that letter upon ginger ale."

"A plague upon all total abstainers," declared Aping-Ayres, with virtuous indignation, "it is my firm conviction that they abstain absolutely from nothing, not even the writing of stupidly offensive letters."

"Roberto, honest heart," murmured Aping-Ayres, meditatively, "have the locusts indeed eaten all the year, or have you, amidst the copious draughts you have quaffed, drowned all the locusts. Which, I wonder, which?" "Angels and Ministers of Grace," continued Aping-Ayres, "can it be possible, a paltry fifty pounds, a mere shadow across my path, and Reginaldo, the sole confidant and sharer of my misfortunes, away upon tour for six months, playing the juvenile lover to a lady old enough to be his grandmother. Am I strong enough to smoke a pipe? Will my shaking hand retain sufficient of its cunning to fill the bowl with the fragrant weed? I doubt it; indeed, I doubt everything, most of all, myself," concluded Aping-Ayres, as he slowly filled the pipe in question and lit a match.

The advent of Mrs. Wildgoose put an end to any further ruminations in which Aping-Ayres might have indulged.

"There is a woman downstairs who wants to see you, sir."

Aping-Ayres stared mistrustfully at Mrs. Wildgoose, through his eye-glass.

"I don't know any women well enough to warrant their calling on me when I am in my dressing-gown," remarked Aping-Ayres, loftily, "and I have no female creditors, I am thankful to say, Mrs. Wildgoose."

"Well, sir, she insists upon seeing you, and she seems very upset."

"I knew it," groaned Aping-Ayres, "and she has come here for the sole purpose of upsetting me, most probably about something in which I haven't the least interest. Why should I be upset?" demanded Aping-Ayres, plaintively. "Argue with her, Mrs. Wildgoose, persuade her with gentle reason to leave at once; otherwise call your husband, and adopt harsher

measures ; failing that, summon the policeman who perambulates Church Street all day long doing nothing, invoke the protection of the law, and give him twopence, which I will refund to you, upon some more convenient occasion."

"She seems very respectable, sir."

"All women are respectable, Mrs. Wildgoose. Ahem ! at least, I have always been brought up in that belief."

"Yes, yes, of course, sir, but am I to show her up ?"

"Certainly not, Mrs. Wildgoose ; show her out."

"Yes, sir, but I can't move her."

"Good heavens ! then how do you expect me to ?" enquired Aping-Ayres, helplessly. "You know the state of my nerves, Mrs. Wildgoose."

"Yes, sir. I mean no, sir, I don't know, sir."

"You don't know, Mrs. Wildgoose, and what is more lamentable, you don't care ; I hardly know, myself, at this time in the morning what a terrible state my nerves are in, the least shock, the slightest thing to upset me, might bring on a serious illness, perhaps even the first dread symptoms of a malady to which I hesitate to give a name, Mrs. Wildgoose."

During this colloquy footsteps had ascended the steep stairs, a hesitating hand knocked upon the half-closed door of the sitting-room, and the startled gaze of Aping-Ayres, who was about to make his retreat, encountered the handsome and comely face of Martha Cray.

Aping-Ayres found himself shaking hands with and welcoming a new Martha, however, whose face was pale, whose hands trembled, and whose eyes were red with weeping.

"Why didn't you send up your name, Martha ?"

"I did, sir."

"Yes, sir, she did," interpolated Mrs. Wildgoose.

"Then why didn't you tell me ?" demanded Aping-Ayres.

"I did try, sir, but you went on that much, sir, that I didn't have time," announced Mrs. Wildgoose, in hurt tones, as she departed.

"Sit down, Martha. What is the matter ? Why are you crying ?"

"Oh, sir, don't you really know, haven't you read it in all the newspapers ?"

"Read all what in the newspapers, Martha?" enquired Aping-Ayres, as he took a surreptitious, and somewhat shame-faced look at the pile of those unopened journals.

"The tragedy at the bungalow, sir," cried Martha, between her tears.

"Not, not Tinwhumps?" gasped Aping-Ayres, and for a moment, some of the redness of too good living faded from his face, leaving it far paler, and even restoring to it something of its old refinement. "Not that, Martha, quick, what is it?"

"Not that, sir, thank God, but oh, how near, none of us will ever know. The bungalow house, sir, was burned down by fire, only last week. Lady Marian Gray, Miss Amelia, and Lady Janet were burned to death, sir."

"Great heaven!" ejaculated Aping-Ayres. "Martha, do you mean this? Think what you are saying."

"Sir, it's only too true; it was an awful story, it never come out at the inquest, but I had guessed the terrible truth for some time. My mistress, Lady Marian, used to drink."

Aping-Ayres shifted somewhat uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

"Well, sir, I can only suppose that upon that awful night she could not have been in her right senses, and must have put a lighted candle near the muslin curtains. Oh, dear God," sobbed Martha, "I awoke in a glare, my room was on fire; I rushed to Master Philip's room, it was wrapped in flames, and—I jumped from the window, only in time to save myself, it wasn't so very high."

"I never knew it, but it seems Master Philip, who they was always a-locking up in his room for every little fault, used to let himself down, poor lamb, by the creeper, and go out at nights, and but for that, he would have been burned to death as well."

"Oh, sir, when I saw his little figure running towards me, over the sand-dunes, and saw his horrified little face, but knew he was safe, I went on my knees, and I thanked God for saving him there and then; for the others were never saved, they were burnt to death in their beds, whilst they were asleep. Every paper in the land was full of it, sir, and I don't know

how it was you come not to hear of it ; but that isn't all," continued Martha. "The Earl of Wellminster was an old man, he never loved his daughters in his life, it is true, but the shock killed him, sir, brought on some sort of apoplectic fit.

"The Lady Janet's money and property all goes back to her husband's relatives, at her death.. Lady Gray only received a pittance from her father, which ceased at her death. The estate of the young heir of Wellminster is in the hands of trustees, and there is not as much as the provision of one penny for Master Philip."

"The Argaffels," commenced Aping-Ayres.

"Oh, sir, Mr. Ayres, sir," and Martha broke down for some moments, amidst her storm of sobs, "The Argaffels have gone away, abroad, upon a big yacht, cruising, no one knows where, for two years. The Towers is empty, they have left it, and disposed of all their things, before this happened. I am only a poor woman, and could never save anything out of the little wages I got, when I was in the Grays' service. I am engaged to be married, to my cousin, John Cray, the carrier, of Chevister. He is also quite a poor man, but we could manage somehow ; Mr. Ayres, little Master Philip hasn't got a roof or a home to shelter his dear head, and, oh, sir, I come to you, for you was the only one, out of that crowd of people, who ever really cared for 'im. There ain't no one in the world who owns 'im, no one to love 'im except me, and I can't afford to keep 'im. Oh, sir, I thought that—that——"

Aping-Ayres was quite sober now, he was pacing slowly backwards and forwards, up and down the long shabby studio-room.

"God ! yes, I'll give him a home," said Aping-Ayres. "But Martha."

"Yes, sir.

"I'm not a rich man."

"No, sir."

"I—I don't think I'm fit—to look after a child."

"I think so, sir."

"We shall have to rough it."

"Maybe, sir."

"Where is he ?"

"Downstairs, in the four-wheel cab I brought 'im in, don't notice what's happened to 'is face; *she* smashed it one night, when she wasn't 'erself. Pretend you don't notice anything different. He's coming up the stairs now, sir."

Aping-Ayres turned to the open door, and stretched out the arms of his shabby dressing-gown, splashed alike with ink and with wine, towards a little figure wistfully peeping in at the door.

"Tinwhumps," he said, "so you've come to live with me, and I'm going to adopt you."

"Yes," said Tinwhumpinny, "that's right."

CHAPTER XIII

BROAD VIEWS AND NARROW MEANS

APING-AYRES, having installed Martha Cray in the vacant bedroom belonging to his absent friend Reginaldo, and having bid that worthy woman make up a small camp-bed for Tinwhumpinny in Reginaldo's sitting-room, betook himself to his own modest set of two rooms, and, relighting his pipe, commenced to think things over.

Aping-Ayres even indulged in one of the whimsical chuckles he invariably gave vent to upon such occasions as he chanced to be particularly amused.

"Here is a curious state of things," quoth Aping Ayres, uttering his thoughts aloud. "I find myself at the most shaky stage of my entire career, the ready-made father of a family of one, with responsibilities and obligations of no common order to discharge, and with a quite dubious and hazy notion regarding ways and means, or, indeed, anything for the future.

"There is one thing," continued Aping-Ayres, "I shall be spared all expenses of education for the infant prodigy of my adoption, because, without doubt he has been over-educated already, and I will see that he doesn't have any more of it, for the time being, at any rate."

At this juncture Aping-Ayres arose, and walked thoughtfully up and down his long, old-fashioned sitting-room, ruminating deeply.

"Providence," mused Aping-Ayres, "has certainly been upon my side when it arranged that Reginaldo should be away in the provinces, leaving me the use of two empty rooms for my unexpected guests. The same Providence has

undoubtedly been active upon my behalf when it arranged a cheque for fifty pounds. Even if Providence ceases all further efforts upon my behalf, it has at least given me a start amidst the new responsibilities in which I find I am plunged.

"The fact that Martha Cray can only stay a few weeks before departing to get married I look upon in the light of a calamity, for undoubtedly I should have moved somewhere else, and Martha would have completed an excellent trio, and looked after us better than I, personally, have ever been looked after, but here fate intervenes. The Wildgoose will continue to be paramount, she will triumph; and not content with that, she is determined to rub in the fact, for I can distinctly hear her creaking and groaning, and rustling up the stairs. There is something almost indelicate in the way Mrs. Wildgoose divines, intuitively, that one wishes to be alone, yet insists instinctively upon arranging lengthy duets, consisting for the most part of repetitions and reproaches, invariably allotting to herself the bass part, otherwise suitable in every way to her croaky voice.

"Come in, Mrs. Wildgoose," commanded Aping-Ayres, "come in; do not continue to knock outside, it interrupts the first freshness of my morning thoughts, and please deal gently with the brass handle of the door, since, like the blind of the left window, each owe their remaining workable possibilities to the faithful adherence of one screw apiece, which, although shaky in themselves, seem to cry aloud, Mrs. Wildgoose, for that domestic attention which even the higher creatures find it necessary to demand at times.

"Mrs. Wildgoose, have you ever considered the pathetic cry of the little things of life, which will plead eloquently, as only dumb things can, for the urgent necessity of immediate reform? I fear you do not pay any heed to the little things of life, Mrs. Wildgoose."

"Yes, sir, I was about to say, sir——"

"Please, Mrs. Wildgoose, please do not interrupt the continuity, the fluidity of my impressions, however powerless they may be in themselves to either affect or convince you."

"Yes, sir, yes. My husband will set to work, but——"

"What *does* your husband work at, Mrs. Wildgoose?" enquired Aping-Ayres, irrelevantly.

"Well, sir, he never does work, as a rule, I'm sorry to say."

"Happy man, Mrs. Wildgoose; I feel he must be one of the elect. Very, very happy, I consider him."

"I did not come here to talk about my husband, sir, I——"

"Indeed," replied Aping-Ayres, exhibiting every expression of polite surprise, "Mrs. Wildgoose, you astonish me, why not talk about your excellent husband? What more noble theme could a woman find to discuss than the chosen spouse of her bosom? Can any other confidences of the world compare with the cherished recollections which combined companionship engenders in the ever-receptive minds of its devotees? Can the daily offerings of domestic trust and confidence be lightly dismissed when the whole delicate fabric of marital felicity unquestionably yearns for the continual expression of that mutual reciprocity by reason of which stimulus it inevitably continues to survive?"

"I can't follow you in what you say, sir, although I dare say it is all true, but I wanted to tell you I cannot have children at my age."

"We have the example of——" Sarah, Mrs. Wildgoose, interrupted Aping-Ayres, softly.

Mrs. Wildgoose as nearly accomplished a blush as her faded and parchment-like face would permit.

"I was referring, sir, to the child who has just come into the house, and who is going to stay, although you have never even said a single word to me about it, and what I have to say is this——"

"There has been no time, Mrs. Wildgoose. I was, at the actual moment you so providentially arrived, framing a delicate and suitable form of address to present to you upon the subject."

"I don't want any address, sir, and I don't want no child in this house, at all."

"Mrs. Wildgoose, you shock me. He is not a child, Mrs. Wildgoose."

"Well, sir, if he ain't a child, and I don't say but what he is a very taking child, what is he?"

"A Frankenstein, madam, simply a juvenile Frankenstein, manufactured by his unfortunate surroundings in general, and by three damned tutors in particular, and damned with the knowledge of everything he should not have acquired for another ten years. His head must be at bursting-point."

"Good gracious, sir, I hope not."

"It is, I tell you, madam, it is, and if you make one single objection to him, or if you give him one single book to read, except it's full of pictures and nothing else, I will give notice upon the spot."

"Well, sir, if you've made up your mind- —"

"I have, Mrs. Wildgoose; for once in my life I have actually made up my mind definitely upon a given subject."

"Well, sir, and whilst I am speaking about it, I don't care about another woman in the house."

"She is not a woman, Mrs. Wildgoose, she is an angel," answered Aping-Ayres, impressively. "An angel, madam, who during the short time she is here, will lighten your labours, Mrs. Wildgoose. She will keep all the rooms in order. She is a trained servant, and a very good one at that. Think it over, Mrs. Wildgoose, think it over."

Whereupon Mrs. Wildgoose, finding it quite hopeless to get in a single word edgeways concerning her views, took the advice of Aping-Ayres and did think it over, and arrived speedily at the conclusion that she would have far less to do, in addition to which she would be receiving full rent every week instead of half-rent for one set of rooms, and that everything considered it would be to her advantage to accept things as they were with as good a grace as possible.

Aping-Ayres and his friend Reginaldo had never been able to persuade Mrs. Wildgoose to cook any meal whatever for them in the house, with the exception of breakfast, varied occasionally by the preparation of tea in the event of visitors.

Consequently Aping-Ayres lost no time in cashing his cheque and escorting Martha Cray and Tinwhumpinny to an adjacent restaurant for the purpose of refreshment.

"How long the money will last goodness only knows," thought Aping-Ayres, "but whilst it does I will feed the dear souls, so here goes."

From the very first entrance of Tinwhumpinny that young gentleman had seen fit to shorten the name of Aping-Ayres to Robbie.

"I shall call you just that," explained Tinwhumpinny, "for, you see, Roberto sounds all right the way Reginaldo says it, but it doesn't sound the same when I say it; it never will; and I won't call you *Mr. Ayres*."

"Tinwhumps," replied Aping-Ayres, "hitherto in the world I have occupied the unenviable position of the dog with the bad name. I welcome the possibility of changing it in the light of a relief; possibly it may have the effect of bringing me luck. I shall always call you Tinwhumpinny—Tinwhumps, for short."

"Church Street is certainly a remarkable street, is it not, Robbie?"

"Historically or geographically, Tinwhumps?"

"Both. From one of my windows I can see the courtyard which, Mrs. Wildgoose says, was once Nell Gwynne's palace, and Church Street starts with the residence of a Countess, and ends with a rag-and-bone shop."

"Democracy, Tinwhumps, under a quite Bohemian aspect; you might have added by way of completing the picture, that guarding either end of the street is a stately pawnbroker's."

"Robbie, you never have to pawn things, do you?" enquired Tinwhumpinny.

"Occasionally, Tinwhumps, the Bohemian's banker, you know."

"Robbie?"

"Yes."

"Will it—will it—make any difference my being here? Will it make things worse; you know what I mean."

"Tinwhumps," declared Aping-Ayres, solemnly, "it will

make things infinitely better, it will have the effect of cheering me up. Moreover, as you yourself remarked, Church Street is full of strange things. I only rejoice to think," concluded Aping-Ayres, "that we have added yet one other to the collection."

CHAPTER XIV

SOME WAYS OF DISTRIBUTING A FAMILY HEIRLOOM—SOME WAYS OF A DOCTOR—SOME WAYS OF AN ACTOR

APING-AYRES continued to roam around London in a desultory way, now and then venturing to enquire if any manner of literary work was likely to come in his direction. Yet it cannot be said that his efforts in this, or indeed in any other quarter, took any serious form.

The conditions of things at 107, Church Street, were always delightful. Tinwhumpinny never ceased to amuse him, during such times as he was at home, and with regard to Martha, Aping-Ayres frankly confessed, he had never had so many things mended for him in his life, neither had their rooms ever looked so smart and neat, or had he ever received such a lot of kind-hearted attention.

Occasionally, a literary friend, or one of the many artists or sculptors, with which the district abounded, would notice the trio, lunching or dining simply in one or other of the restaurants, and, noticing Martha's pretty face and comely looks, would ask Aping-Ayres, chaffingly, "Are you going to marry, old chap, with a ready-made family?"

"No," Aping-Ayres would reply, coolly, "unfortunately the lady is engaged, otherwise I should be honoured to marry her. With regard to the family, I have a ready-made one already."

"He was always a quaint bird," one of them might remark. "Does he still drink?"

"Yes, like a fish."

"Pity, I suppose he will go to the dogs."

"Oh, we all go that way, sooner or later," would be the cheerful response.

There was one thing that Aping-Ayres could never become reconciled to, and that was the mutilation of Tinwhumpinny's face. Although Aping-Ayres avoided all reference to it, and taking the wise counsel of Martha, pretended never to notice it, he nevertheless considered it a shame that Tinwhumpinny's face should be spoiled, and believed firmly in his own mind that it could be altered.

One day, acting upon impulse, Aping-Ayres went to the telephone office inside the tobacconist's shop near at hand, and searching out a number attached to a name possessing many letters after it, paid his twopence, and 'phoned.

"Is that Dr. Gavin Carstairs?"

"Yes, who is speaking?"

"Aping-Ayres."

"Hullo! haven't seen you since we were at Oxford."

"No, could hardly find your name, with such a mass of letters all round it."

A chuckle from the other side.

"I want to consult you."

"About yourself."

"No, a child."

"What's wrong?"

"A devil of a lot, badly broken nose, disfiguration; sensitive kid, don't want to frighten him."

"Lately?"

"Not long ago. Believe it could be put right."

"Of course, it's easily done in the case of a child. Where can I see him?"

"Ever come to Chelsea?"

"Yes, visit the hospital."

"Could you come to 107, Church Street, one day?"

"Yes, when?"

"Any time you arrange."

"I'm visiting the hospital to-morrow evening, I'll call in."

"What time?"

"I'll let you know."

"Right."

"So long."

Aping-Ayres sought out Martha, and explained ideas. "You see, Martha, it seems a shame he should be like that for life, and the confounded country doctor in that outlandish place evidently left his nose just as it was."

"It does seem a shame, sir."

"Gavin Carstairs is one of the greatest surgeons of the day, I should never have been able to approach him in an ordinary way, but I was up with him at Oxford, where he first started doing his medicine."

"Won't it cost a lot of money, sir?"

"We must see, but if I can manage it, shall I have it done? Shall I speak to Tinwhumps about it, Martha?"

"Yes, sir; I think it would be the best thing to do, if you think his face can be made right again. But let us wait and see what the doctor says."

When Gavin Carstairs called he examined Tinwhumpinny's nose carefully, after Aping-Ayres had delicately prepared the way for such a proceeding.

"Would you like your nose to be made quite right again, and as it used to be?" the doctor had asked Tinwhumpinny.

Tinwhumpinny considered for a space. "How will it be done?" he had asked.

"Perfectly easily, and quite successfully; it would only leave a tiny white mark across the top part of the nose that would hardly be noticed."

"After carving me up in sections?" enquired Tinwhumpinny.

Gavin Carstairs laughed.

"You would know nothing about it."

"You would chloroform me, you mean."

Gavin Carstairs looked across, quizzically, at Aping-Ayres. He had attended a good many children in his life, but he felt the self-possession of this one was, to say the least of it, unusual.

"What is the effect of chloroform like?" enquired Tinwhumpinny.

"Oh, really, not at all bad," replied the doctor. "You just go off, you know;" then, believing truthfulness was

perhaps best, he added, "it makes you rather sick afterwards."

"How beastly!" remarked Tinwhumpinny. "Robbie, do you particularly want me to be a victim?"

"Well, yes, old chap, it is for your own good."

"All the most unpleasant things in the world always are," agreed Tinwhumpinny. "Anyway, Robbie, I'll do it if you want me to. I'll be a sacrifice."

Again the doctor laughed, for the life of him, he could not help doing so.

"Tinwhumps," suggested Aping-Ayres, "I want to talk to the doctor, and there are one or two details that—er——"

"All right, Robbie, I'll go, so that you can both conduct the post mortem in the absence of the body."

"I haven't killed you yet," objected the highly amused doctor.

"No," said Tinwhumpinny, "but perhaps I'll be half dead before I am through."

"I'll see that you are not that, old chap; I'll look after you."

"Thank you," said Tinwhumpinny, as he prepared to leave them, "I certainly shall not be capable of looking after myself whilst I am under chloroform."

"What an extraordinary boy!" said Gavin Carstairs; "I've never met such a boy in my life."

Aping-Ayres grinned. "How much will it cost?" he asked.

"I shall not charge you anything for operating. No, no, my dear Ayres, the privilege of an old friend; but he will have to go to a Nursing Home, it is under my direction, there will be nurses' fees, and the doctor, board, etc., etc."

"About how much?"

"About thirty-five guineas."

"You are sure his nose can be put right?"

"Absolutely, as I told you, perhaps one little white line, which will only show across the nose if he gets a high colour, or in moments of excitement, in fact, hardly show at all; otherwise his face will be as it was before, without any disfiguration whatever."

"Yes, but I cannot accept your offer, to operate for nothing."

"Not another word," urged Gavin Carstairs. "Bring him to this address in Weymouth Street next Monday. I will operate, and he will be home and well in a month to five weeks."

"It won't injure him in any way, or completely upset his health, which is awfully good, will it?"

"Lord bless your soul, no. There is one thing I would like to bet on," observed the doctor.

"What?"

"He is going to be an eye-opener to the nurses and the other doctor," and Gavin Carstairs laughed quietly as he went away.

It was a significant fact that, the following day, Aping-Ayres stepped out of a first-class jeweller's in Vigo Street, with the sum of thirty-five pounds in his pocket.

Behind him he had left a rare and ancient gold fob, with its valuable old jewel seals, that had been handed down in his family for many generations, before they had been given to him in turn by his father.

"Bits of the family plate," sighed Aping-Ayres, whimsically, "gone, gone, alas! Family face, or rather the face of my one ly, much more important. Family plate not much of an ornament to me. Tinwhump's face would be an ornament to anybody. Only one tiny white mark, Carstairs said. Ugh! when I think of it, I feel like a butcher. Ugh! beastly; I must have a brandy and soda."

After consuming several brandies and sodas, by way of fortifying himself, Aping-Ayres had arrived at the pitch of promising to sit by the side of Tinwhumpinny whilst he was under chloroform during the operation.

Secretly, but nevertheless firmly, Aping-Ayres had confided to the surgeon, Gavin Carstairs, that nothing would induce him to remain and witness the actual operation upon his small charge. "It would be absolutely more than flesh and blood could stand," declared Aping-Ayres.

Consequently, it was agreed that directly the operation had been performed, and Tinwhumpinny had been bandaged,

Aping-Ayres should be recalled to the room and take up his former position beside him.

There can be little doubt that Aping-Ayres actually suffered far more than Tinwhumpinny, who was unconscious throughout.

Aping-Ayres, as he paced about in an outside room, was conscious of every horrible impression that his imagination could conjure up; he even once burst out of the room under the impression that he ought to stop the operation at the eleventh hour at any cost.

Fortunately, recollecting in time that such a proceeding would be sheer idiocy, Aping-Ayres alternately rammed his knuckles into his ears, oblivious of the fact that not a sound was to be heard, and helplessly nursed his somewhat reddened nose as if that organ was about to be forcibly removed from his own face.

Martha had wisely decided to stay at home. "I should only be in the way, sir," Martha had explained to Aping-Ayres. "He will have the best nursing it is possible for him to have, and I shall be able to do more for him later on."

Martha was invaluable in a sick-room, but she stood in awe of operations of any sort.

When one of the nurses at length came to tell Aping-Ayres that it was all over, the nurse smiled, in spite of herself, at the picture of abject misery that gentleman presented, for Aping-Ayres had all the appearance of a man who had spent a final hour unusually crammed with reminiscences in the condemned cell.

"The doctor says it has been a perfectly successful operation, sir."

Aping-Ayres shivered.

"Is he alive?" gasped Aping-Ayres, in a shaky voice.

"Good gracious, sir, yes. He is coming round splendidly. You can come in now."

Aping-Ayres groped his way into the room where the operation had taken place with his eyes shut at long intervals. What he imagined he was going to see was, perhaps, not very clear even to himself.

Anyway, Aping-Ayres determined not to see anything for a little space, whatever it might be.

He sank into a chair beside Tinwhumpinny and grasped his hand convulsively, whilst he experienced, as he afterwards declared, all the sensations of a state executioner during the Tudor period.

Some time afterwards, when Tinwhumpinny, bandaged but otherwise comfortable, had gone off to sleep, Gavin Carstairs took Aping-Ayres away from the room.

"Man alive," exclaimed the cheery surgeon, "it is one of the best operations I have ever done. It's a triumph."

"It may kill him," remarked Aping-Ayres, dismally.

"Rot! Why, he's splendid. He will be home in four to five weeks, soon as it is perfectly set, as right as rain."

"Come and see him as often as you can, and read and talk to him if you like."

Aping-Ayres found it necessary to fortify himself with several more brandies before proceeding home to Martha to impart the news of the day's proceeding, and it is to be supposed that Martha merely mistook his condition for extreme nervousness when he kept repeating over and over again that they must each visit Tinwhumpinny every day, and have his room always full of fresh flowers.

He would always end up his oration by declaring solemnly, "Martha, he will live."

"Good gracious, sir," cried Martha, "you didn't suppose he would die, did you?"

Aping-Ayres would shake his head and blink his eyes. "It would have killed me, Martha, yes, I am convinced it would have killed me. It has been the most beastly day, Martha, that I ever remember. It is a horrible day of blood, Martha, and I shall immediately obliterate the date on the calendar with red ink, Martha."

What particular comfort Aping-Ayres derived from this proceeding can only be a matter of conjecture, but the fact remains that a scratched out square of red ink upon the shabby calendar in Aping-Ayre's sitting-room, bore testimony throughout that year to the date on which Tinwhumpinny's face was put right.

Very late the same night, Aping-Ayres was violently aroused from his slumbers by being roughly shaken in his sleep. He

awoke to the fact that Mr. Reginald Chambers was shouting something aloud in his ears, and it was a highly indignant Mr. Chambers.

"Roberto!"

"Hullo! Have you come back? What the devil's the matter, Reginaldo?"

"Matter," roared Reginaldo, "good Lord, matter! There's a woman in my room. How dare a woman invade the sanctity of my bedroom? Who is she? Roberto, what has taken place in my absence? Roberto, have you ceased to be inoral? Roberto, I insist upon an answer at once, and if not a full confession, at least a partial explanation."

Aping-Ayres sat up in bed and laughed outright at the comical appearance of his distraught friend.

"It's Martha," he explained.

"Who the devil's Martha, and what is Martha, as you call her, doing in my room, positively sound asleep in my bed? It has shocked my every sense of propriety, it has scandalized me out of my senses. It has, positively," concluded Reginaldo, loftily, "spoiled my home-coming."

"It is Martha Cray," explained Aping-Ayres, as soon as he could manage to speak at all, "she and Tinwhumps are living here."

"Where do I live? Where do I abide?" demanded Reginaldo.

"Here, with me, for a bit whilst you are at home. I will take the sofa in the sitting-room," said Aping-Ayres obligingly; "you can have my bed."

Whereupon Aping-Ayres told Reginaldo the history of Tinwhumpinny's arrival.

As the recital proceeded, Reginaldo whistled.

"By Jove!" he said. "How on earth are you going to keep them, Roberto? You and I were always pretty hard up, even by ourselves, I'm damned if I know how you are going to manage, old sport!"

"No, I'm damned if I know myself," rejoined Aping-Ayres, hopefully.

"Roberto, honest heart, I think myself you will be in queer street."

"I am," acquiesced Aping-Ayres, "I'm actually there already, Reginaldo; don't rub that unwelcome fact in, however. Have you anything to suggest?"

Reginaldo communed with himself for a space.

"No," confessed Reginaldo, at length, "I can't suggest a single thing. But, of course, you are doing the only thing that is possible. Can I help?"

"Have you come back with any money?" enquired Aping-Ayres.

"Haven't saved a single shilling," confessed Reginaldo.

"Blued it all, Reginaldo?"

"Every penny. The agéd, agéd lady I have to act love-scenes with every night, got upon my nerves to such an extent I sought forgetfulness in the joy of living. I sojourned at the most expensive hotels. I gave banquets to the other jovial members of the company who all fully sympathized with me, and behold, Roberto——"

"The return of the prodigal," concluded Aping-Ayres.

"No fatted calf," lamented Reginaldo, "no forgiving father, anxious to fling his wealth at me. No Wildgoose, to welcome me with a cold collation. The house plunged in debt and gloom, Martha inhabiting my room, and Tinwhumpinny in a hospital. Not even a drink."

"Oh, nonsense!" suddenly exclaimed Aping-Ayres. "There's half a bottle of whisky in the cupboard, and a syphon of soda, bring them out at once."

"Roberto," exclaimed Reginaldo, dramatically, "Roberto, you have saved my life. Heaven has left me one friend Roberto, your health, honest heart. We will wassail to-night, for to-morrow I have to depart."

CHAPTER XV

SOME OF THE WAYS OF TINWHUMPINNY

IT was by no means an uncommon experience for Aping-Ayres to be awakened during, what he considered, outrageously early hours of bright mornings, to a sense of consciousness, with an odour of scented oatmeal soap, together with a general impression that his head had been steeped in wet moss.

The cause of these unique impressions was invariably Tinwhumpinny holding a cup of tea prepared by Martha in one hand, whilst he pressed a cold moist sponge, half as big as himself, by way of a soothing process, over Aping-Ayres' head.

"Tinwhumps," Aping-Ayres would observe severely, "given a partially enamelled tin bath, together with the other necessary implements, I consider you can make more noise than anybody I have ever met. There is, moreover, only a thin partition, separating my sleeping-couch from the place of your absurdly active ablutions. Young grampuses rising from the deep, hippopotami wallowing in their morning mud, and elephants taking a dip, are feeble in comparison with yourself. Furthermore, you absolutely reek of soap, and that doubtless worthy, but absurd sponge, is quite out of proportion to your size."

"Yes, but," Tinwhumpinny would grin, "isn't it a consolation to know that I wash, and as for the sponge, do you know, Robbie, that one can travel anywhere on a really good sponge, and get quite a lot of marked respect from others."

Aping-Ayres only chuckled by way of an answer.

"Once," continued Tinwhumpinny, "when I went to the Argaffels', two new footmen, who didn't know me, stared at the

small bundle of baggage I possessed with contempt, so I produced the sponge, and the change in their manner was miraculous. They at once supposed I must be somebody of importance."

"Never heard before of a sponge as a decoration conferring distinction," said Aping-Ayres.

"Well, anyway, some of the kings in the South Sea Islands don't wear anything else."

Tinwhumpinny would always lay the cherished article in question upon the window ledge to dry in the sun.

"Robbie, you know that Martha's wedding is in a few days' time: what can we give her?"

"Well," remarked Aping-Ayres, "I thought of giving the wedding breakfast at the Italian Restaurant. I don't know about presents, don't think the funds will run to it."

"I know," said Tinwhumpinny, "let's give her a big bouquet."

"That's rather a good idea, Tinwhumps: we could get a magnificent one made up at Covent Garden, only I should never be up early enough," confessed Aping-Ayres. "You see, Tinwhumps, we should have to be there before five o'clock in the morning."

"Well, I could wake you up, Robbie."

"I know you would," agreed Aping-Ayres, looking helplessly at the ceiling, "but I object to be awakened at such an hour, it's—it's positive cruelty, and I sleep so badly, Tinwhumps."

"Seems to me," said Tinwhumpinny, "that you sleep jolly well; whenever I come in you want an awful lot of waking, that's why I always use the sponge as a last hope of rousing you. Anyway, Robbie, couldn't you get up early, just for once? for Covent Garden would be the very place to get her bouquet, and you know Martha will never be married again."

"She might be," queried Aping-Ayres, somewhat weakly.

"Well, Robbie, at least we suppose that she won't."

"I agree," said Aping-Ayres, "only I shall have to go to bed ridiculously early overnight."

"Well, you never do, Robbie, you keep awful hours, don't you?"

"Yes," admitted Aping-Ayres, "mine is a dreadful life."

"I don't know, Robbie, you get a good deal of enjoyment out of it."

"You don't know how I suffer," Aping-Ayres would retort, loftily.

Tinwhumpinny would stop looking out of the window, and turn a face full of mockery upon the late riser.

"Are you supposed to be suffering now?"

"Yes, Tinwhumps, you are disturbing my morning sleep. I require quite another two hours before I can face the day."

Tinwhumpinny would always prepare to depart at any such hints.

"The day will be over, Robbie, before you are dressed."

"I hope so," Aping-Ayres would say sleepily, "I hope so, Tinwhumps; I'm afraid I prefer the night, I seem to be more myself at night." Then as Tinwhumps closed the door and vanished, Aping-Ayres would add, "or less myself at night; which, I wonder? I certainly drink too much." Consoled by this truth, Aping-Ayres would quite contentedly drop off to sleep again, and remain so, often until the sun was high in the heavens and the golden bars stealing through the windows had crept right up to the camp bed on which he lay, shedding their golden light all around him and fully illumining a face which had in it a lot of tenderness, a world of humanity, and be it also added, the marks that the dissipation of drink were slowly but surely leaving upon every feature.

Some days before Martha's wedding Aping-Ayres made up his mind upon one point at any rate. He noticed that Tinwhumpinny's clothes were getting shabby, and after much counting and recounting of his remaining money, resolved to buy him some more.

Aping-Ayres accordingly stalked majestically into one of the many excellent clothing establishments to be found in the Brompton Road, and having piloted himself after considerable difficulty into the department devoted to juvenile wardrobes, demanded to see some white drill sailor suits.

"Yes, sir," enquired the courteous shopman, "and what size, sir?"

Up went Aping-Ayre's eye-glass into his eye. "What do

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you mean, what size?" he enquired somewhat helplessly, despite a loftiness of manner he was far from feeling.

"Well, sir, we must know within a little."

"Oh—ah—yes," replied Aping-Ayres, as he measured imaginary heights with his hand above the floor. "Yes, as you say, within a little I should say about that," and Aping-Ayres' hand, sometimes inclined towards shakiness, steadied itself above the floor at a height he believed would have corresponded with Tinwhumpinny had he been present.

The shopman instantly smothered the smile that was about to appear upon his face when he encountered the glass-shrouded eye of Aping-Ayres', frigid in its solemnity and full of an importance that the occasion appeared to warrant.

"Perhaps, sir, it would be better to give me the age," suggested the shopman. "You know we stock the white drill sailor suits and outfits, and they run roughly a good deal in ages, sir."

"Right," said Aping-Ayres, "I want two suits complete for thirteen, not fat and not thin, and not dumpy, sort of sturdy, don't you know."

The man indulged in a grin as he disappeared, and there is no doubt that he endeavoured to do his best by way of a selection.

"I want two pairs of shoes, one black and one brown," announced Aping-Ayres, after making a selection of two white drill sailor suits.

"Those will be in the shoe department, sir."

"I absolutely refuse to walk around finding any other departments," said Aping-Ayres. "I invariably lose my way."

"Very well, sir, I have no doubt I can bring them to you here. What size, sir?"

"Oh—er—same size as the clothes."

Once again the man smiled as he made for the boot department.

"I wonder if his wife has run away," grinned the good-natured shopman. "Just imagine letting him loose to shop by himself, when he knows about as much what he wants as my baby at home would."

"If these things should not be quite right, sir, we shall of course be glad to change them for you."

"Why shouldn't they be quite right?" demanded Aping-Ayres, "They are er—quite fashionable, are they not?"

"Yes, sir, the very best and latest thing, of course they may be all right," remarked the shopman hopefully as he presented Aping-Ayres with his receipted bill.

Declining to allow the two fairly big parcels to be sent Aping-Ayres walked home in triumph and summoned Tinwhumpinny and Martha to share in the glow of satisfaction he was himself experiencing.

Tinwhumpinny was unfeignedly delighted with the purchases made for him, but Martha smiled and shook her head.

"Why didn't you take me with you, sir, when you went shopping? they are all several sizes too big."

"Good gracious!" groaned Aping-Ayres, "have I got to go through all that again?"

"No, sir; it will be all right. I will change them for you, and take Master Philip with me."

"But, Martha," objected Aping-Ayres, "that shopman must be a fool. I measured Tinwhumpinny's height exactly."

Martha smiled. "Clothes are very deceptive, sir."

"Well, I don't understand it," said Aping-Ayres.

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "I think I do, Robbie," he said, "and I'm sure Martha does. Let's leave it to her."

CHAPTER XVI

MARTHA'S WEDDING DAY

THE rose tints of an early autumn dawn were staining the great pillars of the Piazza of St. Paul's, Covent Garden, in faint moistened colours of pink with pearly blue shadows. The opal light even transfigured the stately pigeons, changing their feathers to transparent pink and shimmering smoke grey as they strutted amidst the brilliant patches of green cabbage leaves that had fallen from the unloading carts. Everywhere the eye rested upon brilliant blotches of colour. The great masses of stacked flowers around might almost have created the spot one of the brilliant patches of fairyland, if the crunching of waggon wheels and the roar of voices had not dispelled the illusion and proclaimed it to be only one of the busy marts of the world.

Tinwhumpinny sat upon the plinth of the second big pillar of the portico of St. Paul's, eating some fruit by way of an early breakfast, waiting for Robbie to appear with Martha's wedding bouquet, wholly absorbed in the bright kaleidoscopic scene continually changing its wonderful colours around him.

"It's the most foreign scene in all London," observed Tinwhumpinny, as Robbie emerged triumphantly carrying an enormous bouquet of many coloured flowers.

"Yes," agreed Aping-Ayres, "I certainly feel all abroad in it. What do you think of the flowers, Tinwhumps?"

"Gorgeous, Robbie; don't you think so?"

"Yes," demurred Aping-Ayres, "they were your choice, you know, but I am not exactly certain the flowers are precisely the right selection for a wedding."

"Why not?"

"Well, wouldn't something all white have been better?"

"But, Robbie, why should people choose the same sort of flowers always for a wedding as they would for a funeral?"

"Do they?" queried Aping-Ayres, as if the idea had occurred to him for the first time. "I hardly know, Tinwhumps. I'm afraid I have never presided at either of these functions before."

"You see, Robbie, Martha is a country woman, and of the country, and I chose the sort of flowers she knows best and loves most."

"Yes," agreed Aping-Ayres, "the woman inside the arcade who made them up seemed to think you knew what you were about. It was perfectly amazing to me, Tinwhumps, how every single person in this market with any flowers to sell at all, immediately offered them to you, for next to nothing. I wonder," concluded Aping-Ayres, "they didn't offer to give them to you."

"Some of them did," rejoined Tinwhumpinny, calmly; "they know I love them, I suppose."

"Have you made yourself ill with green apples?"

"I hope not, Robbie; are you going now?"

"Yes, and propose to seize the first cab I see."

"Why a cab?"

"Do you suppose, Tinwhumps, we can procure any other conveyance at this unearthly hour? and do you imagine for a single moment I intend to invite the derision of the few people who are unfortunate enough to be up and out of bed, by carrying an almost Byzantine bouquet about with me, twice as large as Covent Garden clock?"

"I didn't know you were so sensitive, Robbie; anyway you have the consolation of knowing the bouquet was most expensive."

"I should think it was," said Aping-Ayres, "but I am quite sure it would have cost three times as much anywhere else."

Seated inside a somewhat dishevelled handsome cab, whose horse and driver both conveyed the impression that they had been out all night, Aping-Ayres confided to Tinwhumpinny

that he hoped to arrive home in time to have two or three hours' more sleep before dressing for the day's ceremony. Tinwhumpinny immediately objected.

"No, you don't Robbie: you've just got to keep awake and be bright for the wedding."

"Have you any reason to suppose, Tinwhumps, that I shall not be bright?"

"Yes," answered Tinwhumpinny promptly, "I have; you see, Robbie, you somehow will speak of Martha as if we were going to bury her instead of marry her."

Aping-Ayres sighed dolefully. "I am afraid we shall never see her again. What on earth shall we do without her?"

"Oh, we shall manage," declared Tinwhumpinny confidently. "She has taught me a lot of things about how to manage and how to cook a few things too."

Aping-Ayres looked dubious. "No, Tinwhumps, I am afraid it will have to be restaurants; I do not eat very much, but I am quite particular about the way in which it is prepared."

"How do you know I can't cook, Robbie?"

"I don't exactly know," confessed Aping-Ayres, "but I surmise. Tinwhumps, I can almost see you of a morning whilst I am still wrapped in slumber, preparing breakfast and gravely considering whether an egg ought to remain in the water twelve or fourteen minutes. I can positively picture you utterly neglecting an omelette during its most critical stage, by suddenly remembering you had forgotten to feed the sparrows outside with bread crumbs; I can realize how slices of bacon would sizzle impotently in their own rage and fat and turn writhing and blackened faces of reproach towards you, being thoroughly overdone, whilst you watched the morning sky, and wondered what the white fleecy clouds had to tell you every morning they scudded overhead."

Tinwhumpinny laughed.

"Oh, Robbie, what a perfect picture you draw of incompetence!"

"All poets are incompetent," asserted Aping-Ayres.

"I'm *not* a poet," declared Tinwhumpinny stoutly.

"Anyway you are a 'puzzle,'" insisted Aping-Ayres with a jovial grin.

"Is that why you are always trying to put me together, Robbie?"

Once more Aping-Ayres grinned amusedly. "I may try at times to analyze you, Tinwhump3, but I really wouldn't alter you; and when Martha has gone I will try and do for you what she did for us both, and see, there is Martha watching for us out of the window."

Tinwhumpinny seized the bouquet, leaving Robbie to pay the fare, and held it up triumphantly for Martha to see.

"Martha, Martha, what do think of it?"

Martha blushed all over her pretty comely face, and her bright eyes smiled delightedly.

"Oh, Master Philip, how lovely!"

"Many happy returns of the day, Martha," called Tinwhumpinny.

"Really, Tinwhumps," objected Aping-Ayres, "I do not think that is quite a moral wish."

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "Martha knows what I mean," he said, "and for a moment I was thinking it was a birthday."

Martha's wedding took place in the old church at Chelsea, and Tinwhumpinny arrayed in one of his new white suits stood behind her supporting in a somewhat wobbly fashion the huge bouquet which completely obliterated him from the view of the officiating clergyman.

Perhaps the most startling thing that happened was the sudden and unexpected appearance of Mr. Reginald Chambers at the church door, who managed to get off for the day. He was arrayed so wonderfully, that it had to be explained to the short-sighted clergyman, that Reginaldo was not in reality the bridegroom.

Despite the quite natural mistake, Reginaldo conducted himself with such marked elegance, not to say pomp, during the ceremony, uttering such responses as were allotted to him with so much impressiveness, that one might have supposed the chief duty of his daily life was to assist at weddings. Now and then Tinwhumpinny would creep up beside Martha and hold her hand—for support, as he explained afterwards.

A merry little party sat down to a table reserved for them, and screened off, at the Italian Restaurant.

Only two things could be said in any way to interfere with Reginaldo's appetite.

One was the bright blue tie which the bridegroom wore and which made Reginaldo feel faint ; the other chanced to be the fact that the bridegroom showed a marked predilection for onions, which Reginaldo found it impossible to forgive.

Otherwise everything went merrily.

The speech Reginaldo took upon himself to deliver when at the conclusion of the feast he toasted the bride, convulsed the entire restaurant, and could be distinctly heard down the street. What did Reginaldo care ?—he was playing for once a part he thoroughly entered into.

With grandiloquent phrases selected at random from Shakespeare and the Bible (and Reginaldo was never quite certain which was which), he exhorted Martha to always be a bride and always be beautiful. }

He covered the bridegroom with confusion by beseeching him to be faithful, although one glance at the worthy countryman's red honest face would have convinced any one that no alarm need have been entertained upon the point so far as he was concerned. Then with an outburst of oratory, which had he only employed upon the stage would have made Reginaldo's fortune, he bemoaned the wretchedness of the single. "How lost is that man who has no fair companion by his side !" declared Reginaldo in his most tragic tones, "who goes through the path of life alone, unloved ! I am alone," concluded Reginaldo ere he resumed his seat, "I am unloved, it affects me so much I can scarcely eat." Whereupon he sat down.

"Oh, nonsense," said Tinwhumpinny ; "I think you have done yourself bang up."

Even Reginaldo joined in the laugh, for Reginaldo's tragic poses never lasted very long.

The after-treat consisted of a visit to the Tower of London, and Madame Tussaud's, both places being the choice of the bridegroom, whose somewhat curious selection was never even called in question.

During the visit to the Tower, Reginaldo talked so incessantly and so dramatically, moreover reconstructed the darker pages of its history so vividly, that many people followed him in open-eyed amazement and regarded him as a glorified guide lent to them for their especial benefit, greatly to the amusement of Tinwhumpinny and Aping-Ayres.

Yet once again at Madame Tussaud's, did Reginaldo cover the poor bridegroom with utter confusion by pointing out the effigy of a gentleman who had murdered five of his wives, and declaring that history had its greater and more poignant page as a living example of what not to avoid in cherishing of one.

After creating this admirable local impression Reginaldo departed from their midst to catch his train for the town where he was acting that evening.

When the time came to see the happy pair off in their turn to Chevister, they all realized that it had been a thoroughly jolly and happy day. Tinwhumpinny did not say much, but he clung round Martha's neck for a long time when he parted from her.

Martha smiled through her tears at Aping-Ayres and thanked him. Perhaps Martha knew then better than anybody else that she was leaving Aping-Ayres a strange legacy, and Martha also knew she was leaving the legacy in good hands, despite Aping-Ayres' curious shortcomings.

CHAPTER XVII

WHISTLER'S COPPER DOOR

"ROBBIE," enquired Tinwhumpinny, later the same evening, "do you think you could provide me with sixpence?"

"Certainly, Tinwhumps. What do you want to buy—sweets?"

"No, globe polish."

"Not for domestic use inside 107, I hope, Tinwhumps," ventured Aping-Ayres anxiously, as he handed over the coin, and forthwith made a rapid mental note of the various things in his rooms which did not require polishing, according to his own ideas. There was the spirit tantalus, it would be preposterous to polish that, two Sheffield plate cellarettes for the soda water, which had certainly never been polished since Aping-Ayres had possessed them. His silver cigarette case. Aping-Ayres hastily grabbed this article, and removed it to the safety of an inside pocket, to be out of the way of possible temptation.

Tinwhumpinny noted the process. "I am not going to touch any of your things, Robbie."

"Well, Tinwhumps, what *are* you going to use globe polish for?"

"Have you never heard of its being spread upon bread and butter, Robbie?" gravely asked Tinwhumpinny.

"Never," replied Aping-Ayres, with conviction.

"Neither have I, Robbie, for it would assuredly need an acquired taste to appreciate that, so it is safe to assume I am going to use it for some other purpose."

"Now let me see what is it used for—globe polish, globe polish!" muttered Aping-Ayres, as if he had never heard before

of the article in question. "No, Tinwhumps, it's no use, I give it up, it's beyond me."

"Right," said Tinwhumpinny, "you stroll down Church Street in about an hour's time, and turn to the right when you get to Cheyne Walk."

"Far down?"

"Not far."

"Humph! You are going to buy some extraordinary thing or other in the old scrap-iron shop at the end, and polish it up, I suppose?"

"Wrong, Robbie, although you can't grumble at the two old wrought-iron candlesticks I bought there for two bob, to adorn your writing table."

"I have never grumbled at them, Tinwhumps, but I have never liked them, those two old figures holding the candles *will* grin at me when I am writing; their very ugliness fascinates me even to such an extent I positively cannot take my eyes off them."

"That only shows them to be real works of art," replied Tinwhumpinny, calmly, as he proceeded to tear some good-sized strips from an old flannel shirt.

"Now what in the name of wonder is he going to do?" mused Aping-Ayres, as Tinwhumpinny departed. "Surely he is not going to attempt to polish one of those hideous bronze dolphins upon the Embankment! Globe polish is certainly of no use for an impressionist pavement picture, allowing that his curious artistic fancies roamed in that direction. He never does anything without some object, yet globe polish and strips of an old flannel shirt seem to me to be ridiculous things to be in need of at this time of night."

"Damme," exclaimed Aping-Ayres, after reading the evening paper in a desultory sort of way for about an hour: "damme if I don't go and see what it is all about."

The explanation was very simple, although such a thing would never have entered Aping-Ayres' head.

Upon the pavement, in front of what had once been the studio of Whistler, Tinwhumpinny knelt. A friendly policeman stood and conversed with him whilst he finished his self-imposed task.

His task had been to polish the neglected beaten copper daño adorning the door of Whistler's old empty studio.

It shone brilliantly now in the darkness, like a piece of copper golden armour.

"It's the least one can do to his memory," explained Tinwhumpinny, "don't you think so, Robbie?"

"Yes," said Aping-Ayres, "and I also think it is a pity he wasn't here to paint the scene as a nocturne, he would have revelled in its strangeness,—I should think. Tinwhumps," continued Aping-Ayres meditatively, as they moved from the spot, "the more spontaneous the action, the more lamentable the result it often leaves behind. Alas! one white drill suit is ruined, Tinwhumps."

"It will wash," said Tinwhumpinny.

CHAPTER XVIII

POVERTY

It may have been that his old habit was still strong upon him, or it might perhaps have been a growing sense of restlessness at the state of destitution he saw rapidly approaching, but the fact nevertheless remained, that Aping-Ayres frequently lapsed into his unregenerate ways, after the departure of Martha.

At all hours of the night he would stumble up the steep stairs, his mind happily reckless of all consequences, his senses dazed, unquestionably drunk, yet despite that fact still a gentleman, if one could use such a term for such a failing.

Wherever he might chance to go in London, whether morning or evening, dozens of men, and many of them quite famous in the world of art and letters, would ask Aping-Ayres to drink with them, sometimes at their Club, sometimes in well-known hotels. Few of them would ever ask him to lunch or dinner.

He would see that Tinwhumpinny was fully provided for during the day, yet more often than not, he would take nothing himself but a couple of sandwiches.

His mode of life was commencing to show upon his face only too plainly, and Tinwhumpinny noticed it.

Sometimes Aping-Ayres would imagine that Tinwhumpinny's eyes would look at him almost reproachfully, when they took their breakfast together in the morning.

Aping-Ayres might have been right in this surmise, but Tinwhumpinny had never said one word, whatever his thoughts might have been.

All humanity have a common failing of journeying a long way down some road, that only leads either to a blank wall or

a swamp, ere they retrace their steps to find a better and a wiser pathway.

The first time that Aping-Ayres seriously sought to retrace his footsteps probably dated from the early hours of one morning, about six weeks after Martha had left them.

Aping-Ayres had been out the whole of the day, and the entire night. He had met a great many men, all congenial spirits, only too anxious to hear Aping-Ayres talk, for his conversation could, when he chose, be both brilliant and amusing, and never more so than when he was drinking.

Aping-Ayres had entertained them lavishly, and returned with eyes unnaturally bright, a flushed countenance and a head of fire, to say nothing of a sadly depleted purse.

He drew the remaining change out of his pockets, a very little gold, hardly any silver, and lots of coppers, and he was startled at the amount of money he must have spent during the day and night since he had left home, money he knew he could ill afford, and, like all people of his nature, he thought he must have been mad to have flung away so much in reckless hospitality, among a lot of people who would never be of any use to him.

With a shaky hand he turned one of the gas jets up high.

Upon one side of the sitting-room table was a plate with half of one of the cakes Mrs. Wildgoose sometimes made for Tinwhumpinny, at such periods as her good nature was in the ascendant. By the side of it was a partly emptied glass of water. Then, with a shock, Aping-Ayres remembered that he had completely forgotten to provide that day for Tinwhumpinny.

If anything could add to his remorse, it was the silent testimony of those two simple things before him, they were all that Tinwhumpinny could have had the whole of that day since their breakfast.

Aping-Ayres sat in a chair beside them and sunk his head in his hands. "Have I fallen as low as this?" he thought.

It was some time before he raised his head and looked almost helplessly round the sitting-room. Dawn was beginning to come in through the chinks of the blind, a very large steely-blue patch was glimmering through the particular window

where the blind was in a perpetual condition of needing repair.

With an impatient movement, Aping-Ayres turned out the gas and crossed to the window to roll the thing up.

As he stumbled towards the wide old shabby leather sofa, and was about to kneel upon it in order to reach the blind, he saw with amazement that Tinwhumpinny was asleep on the sofa, curled up in one corner in his pyjamas, with a blanket over him.

Was it only the cold early-morning light, or was his face really looking pinched and white and thin?

A far keener remorse than he had ever felt in his life seemed to sober Aping-Ayres suddenly. He kneeled down beside the sleeping child, and looked at his face, long and anxiously.

What thoughts and emotions were passing through his mind, only Aping-Ayres could know.

"I promised to look after him, to give him a home, to take care of him: and this is how I keep my word. God forgive me!"

Softly he crossed to the door and made his way downstairs to the pantry, which was the sole property and sanctum of Mrs. Wildgoose.

He found some eggs, and some slices of bacon and bread. He would pay her for them in the morning.

Returning to the upstairs room that Martha had occupied, he searched for the round methylated spirit stove, which that good woman had often used to cook little things for them.

He hunted about for a jar of methylated spirit. He anxiously shook it to see if there was any left. "Yes, thank goodness, quite enough. Now for the little frying-pan Martha used."

Coffee was in a tin, he knew. There was no milk, yes, half a tin of Nestlé's left; what luck!

Fairly sobered now, he cooked the meal of eggs and bacon, fried some bread, made the coffee, and put it on a tray.

There was no cloth; what did it matter? He extinguished

the flame of the spirit stove and took the tray of things into the room where Tinwhumpinny was asleep.

It was four o'clock. He opened one of the windows, and roused Tinwhumpinny gently.

"Why, Robbie, is it night or morning?"

"Tinwhumps, Tinwhumps, old man, will you forgive me? See what I've brought you."

Tinwhumpinny stroked the hot dishevelled head with one hand, and looked at his strange friend. Perhaps he read some of Aping-Ayres' thoughts, which were just then telling their own tale.

"Perhaps, Robbie," he said, "something else——"

"Not perhaps this time, Tinwhumps, for certain, no more of it. You came in here to wait up for me?"

"Yes, I was all alone."

"You won't be alone any more. Eat your breakfast Tinwhumps."

Tinwhumpinny looked at the clock. "What a funny time for breakfast, Robbie!"

"Four hours before your usual time."

"Aren't you going to bed, Robbie?"

"No, I'm going to wash, and then start to work like mad."

Tinwhumpinny continued to drink his coffee.

"Tinwhumps, I've just seen something for the first time, clearer than I have ever seen anything in my life."

"I know," nodded Tinwhumpinny. "Pisgah."

"Yes," said Aping-Ayres, slowly, as he departed to wash the stains of the day and night away. "Perhaps—Pisgah."

Tinwhumpinny made no reply. He had tucked himself up again, and gone to sleep.

CHAPTER XIX

ABJECT POVERTY

THE mulish obstinacy of people who, once having given a dog a bad name, religiously stick to their opinions, and make the dog's name worse by a perpetual crusade of their opinions, is always a matter for regret.

Stupid and stolid people are invariably reiterative at all times, whatever may happen to be their opinions.

Constant reiteration will invariably produce in the minds of the unthinking a feeling of conviction, and a comforting sense that they have in some way become recipients of the truth.

Consequently, Aping-Ayres slowly becoming awakened to new responsibilities, and furthermore, commencing to make efforts such as he had never made before in his happy-go-lucky life, found himself handicapped by the reputation of his many past lapses.

For the first time in his life, people professed to discover that he was in debt, and credit became proportionately difficult to obtain.

People noticed that his clothes were shabby. Aping-Ayres noticed it himself.

Unfortunately, the majority of the world are snobs, despite the fact that every one hastens to deny the imputation.

The man-about-town, becoming shabby as to wardrobe, who was once asked which he would sooner have, a good set of evening dress clothes or a series of dinners by way of a present, remarked cynically, that he would choose the clothes, and the dinners would inevitably follow as a matter of course,

showed, by the wisdom of his choice, a supreme knowledge of his fellow-creatures.

In London, to be dressed shabbily is the way to be avoided ; to own to being out of work of whatever kind, is a certain way of obtaining none.

Aping-Ayres had long ago pocketed any silly sense of pride, and had applied for anything or everything, and he was clever enough to do most things, yet hitherto the result had always been the same.

People had thought, "Hullo ! he never used to do this, he is down on his luck, there must be something wrong with him. Let me see now, what did I hear about him ? Oh yes, of course, clever chap, but he drinks. Well, of course, there you are."

So the little-minded, of equally little importance, became quite big, Pharisaically, and preened themselves in their own unsophisticated virtue during the process.

Occasionally, an article or a short story would be accepted, and Aping-Ayres would hoard it to make it go as far as possible for Tinwhumpinny, as any miser might hoard his gold.

The fifty pounds, for the most part most judiciously expended, had long since been spent.

Surreptitiously, and without the knowledge of Tinwhumpinny, Aping-Ayres was pawning article after article from his rooms. It was perfectly astonishing the number of articles he found upon which he could get something in order that Tinwhumpinny might not want.

Sometimes a picture, or a piece of china, more often a book, so that his library became a vanishing quantity. Last of all, clothes, of which he had possessed a quantity, and those of the most expensive kind, were parted with for the necessities of life.

Never a word to Tinwhumpinny, who being totally unused to such a state of things, never realized how near the wolf was creeping up to them.

The laundry bills Aping-Ayres groaned over, but somehow contrived to pay. The scuttles of coal, so that Tinwhumpinny could have a fire in the now snowy weather, for which Mrs.

Wildgoose charged sixpence apiece, however inadequately filled, Aping-Ayres regarded as robbery, and that of the most bloodthirsty nature.

One winter's evening, when Aping-Ayres found he could do without a once expensive knitted silk waistcoat, which together with his only overcoat brought a remuneration of fifteen shillings, he realized things were drawing very near to their possible limit.

The presentation by Mrs. Wildgoose, for two months' rent for the double set of rooms, together with a demand for instant payment, added to an intimation that the milkman who supplied milk, and the grocer who supplied tea, were each of them precisely in her own frame of mind, did not assist in the delusion that his credit was inexhaustible.

"It is about time I told Tinwhumps the truth," mused Aping-Ayres. "Now let me think what is best to be done."

"At my time of life," reasoned Aping-Ayres, "it is absolutely evident that I cannot expect relations to support me, but there is just a chance that my two rich old aunts, the Miss Apings, in Warwickshire, who cannot possibly spend all their wealth upon themselves, and who have always signified their ridiculous intentions of leaving it to me, probably long after it is likely to be of any use to me, might come to the rescue for Tinwhumps."

"Of course," considered Aping-Ayres, "he would shock them. That might do them good. I believe in their own county they are pillars of the Church. They would at once attempt to make Tinwhumpinny into a pillar also. Tinwhumpinny would most assuredly follow the example of Lot's wife. He might not actually turn into salt, but he would look back. Moreover, he would come back, for I do not myself think he would stay there a week. I tried it myself once as a boy, and I know I couldn't."

"Anyway," concluded Aping-Ayres, "we will feed ourselves up with some dinner first and I will break it gently to him afterwards. It may only be for a time, and later on my luck may turn."

After dinner, Aping-Ayres somehow found the matter quite

as difficult to explain to Tinwhumpinny as it had been before, so he put it off from day to day.

With the last ten shillings of the money Aping-Ayres laid in a stock of tinned meats, thinking, "These, at any rate, will save the daily tips to obsequious waiters who hover around us when we feed out, like gudgeons, all of whom are richer than I am."

A large supply of porridge, which he commanded Mrs. Wildgoose to prepare every morning for Tinwhumpinny's breakfast, took all the rest of the money but a few coppers.

Even despite this care, the days crept on, and no more money, no work, and the food almost exhausted.

Aping-Ayres hardly took any himself, his one anxiety was to make it last as long as possible.

If Tinwhumpinny wanted anything, he never said a word, never asked any questions, never complained.

Tinwhumpinny would nearly always be in the sitting-room where he worked, and when Aping-Ayres resorted to subterfuges that he was too busy to go out to lunch, too busy to go out to dinner, Tinwhumpinny never questioned.

"By Jove! he is wonderful," thought Aping-Ayres. "And what, in Heaven's name, am I by way of a comparison? A dead-beat, yes, that's what I am, a dead-beat."

Perhaps during those last days, Tinwhumpinny had noticed more than he appeared to do, for, once Aping-Ayres had not gone out at all during the entire day, and Tinwhumpinny wondered.

"Robbie," said Tinwhumpinny.

"Yes."

"It's eight o'clock."

"Is it?" remarked Aping-Ayres.

"Are you going to have anything to eat, Robbie? You haven't been out all day."

Hitherto it had been Aping-Ayres' custom to walk abroad for a space, and occasionally return with a piece of pleasing fiction that he had dined out.

To-night he felt reckless, it was too late now for subterfuges, he had determined to tell Tinwhumpinny the truth

to-night, and make him over to the rich Miss Apings as a last resource.

"You know, Robbie, you must have something to eat."

"I don't feel hungry, Tinwhumpa."

"I really ought not to be," explained Tinwhumpinny, "because I've had lots of porridge for breakfast, some tinned beef for lunch. You've had nothing, Robbie."

Aping-Ayres fidgeted, and devoted himself anew to his writing.

"Robbie, have you got fourpence in your pocket by any chance?"

Aping-Ayres fumbled in the direction of his waistcoat pocket, then remembered, too late, that that article had been taken from him. With a slight show of confusion he tried the pockets of his trousers, with greater success, and produced some coppers.

"Yes, Tinwhumps, do you want it particularly? I shall have to get some stamps."

"Yes, I want it for something more important than stamps."

"What, Tinwhumps?"

"Don't be so inquisitive, Robbie."

"You can't get—anything—anything much to eat for fourpence."

"You give it to me and see."

Aping-Ayres complied with the request, and handed over the money.

"I hope," exclaimed Aping-Ayres, as Tinwhumpinny hopped down the steep stairs with an agility usually displayed by mountain-side goats, "I do hope his fancy will not run in the direction of fried fish. I feel that fried fish, embellished with greasy pink newspaper, which is invariably its complimentary wrapping, I presume to catch the vulgar eye of the public, would choke me. Yes, I do hope his undoubtedly refined instincts will enable him to avoid anything so unappetizing."

Tinwhumpinny returned, hugging a paper bag, it was rather a disreputable-looking paper bag, but its contents appeared to be very precious to Tinwhumpinny.

"What—er—what is it?" enquired Aping-Ayres, as he

prodded one side delicately with one finger, speedily withdrawing it upon finding the surface was nearly red hot.

"Coaxed the man at the end of the street to let me have four for threepence."

"Let you have *what*, Tinwhumps?" demanded Aping-Ayres, firmly fixing his eye-glass in his eye. "A man in the street! What man, Tinwhumps? It sounds most common."

"Yes," answered Tinwhumpinny, cheerfully, "it is common, and I wonder we never thought of it before. Baked potatoes, Robbie, four of them, and jolly big ones at that."

"Humph!" said Aping-Ayres, "yes, that is rather sensible, Tinwhumps. Was—er—was the man fairly clean?"

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "Why, Robbie, it couldn't make any difference to the potatoes even if he wasn't, they are baked inside their jackets."

"Ah, good," observed Aping-Ayres. "Two forks, and a little pepper and salt."

"Here are the forks, but the other is all done."

"Did—did the creature touch them with his fingers, Tinwhumps?"

"No, Robbie, I did all that; he only sprinkled them. Don't be faddy, Robbie."

"There is something else in the bag," remarked Aping-Ayres, as he started to demolish his own particular portion.

"Yes, I got a pennyworth of chestnuts, too."

"Tinwhumps," said Aping-Ayres, "I often think you are wonderful."

"I don't know about being wonderful, Robbie. I'm practical."

Tinwhumpinny knelt down and spread out the chestnuts upon the broad bar of the old-fashioned Adam fire-grate, and turned them from time to time.

Underneath, the grate was adorned with an iron open-work representation of a cottage, by way of keeping in the cinders. When the fire was alight, the miniature door and windows of the cottage were also lighted.

Many a time Aping-Ayres had looked into the old quaint device when he told Tinwhumpinny stories at night, wonderful stories drawn from his imagination, of a nature which might

interest him. He somehow always found the little lighted friendly cottage gave him inspiration. He drew up his chair now, and looked into the glow of it for a long time without speaking.

"Tinwhumps."

"Yes, Robbie."

Aping-Ayres paused. What he had to say was even more difficult than he had supposed.

He cleared his throat and made another valiant effort.

"I have two rich old aunts who live in the country, in—in Warwickshire. I am going to ask them to let you stay there for a bit."

Tinwhumpinny sat very silent.

"I am going to leave Church Street."

"Where are you going, Robbie?"

"I—I haven't quite decided yet, but, anyway, you will have a jolly good home, and everything you want, you know, Tinwhumps, and—and they will like you awfully, and I shall write to you, wherever I am, and—you see——"

"Robbie, look me in the face."

"I can't," explained Aping-Ayres, "whilst you stand at the back of my chair like that, and butt me in the neck with your head like a young goat."

Tinwhumpinny came round the chair, and put two hands, one upon either side of Aping-Ayres' grizzled head, both hands were rather black from the chestnut cooking.

"Robbie, do you think I would let you go out alone?"

"I couldn't take you with me, Tinwhumps. I have nowhere to go, until I can make some money. I have no home, nothing I can give you for a time, old man."

Tinwhumpinny still continued to comb the gray locks of the head in front of him with his fingers, a good deal of the black from the fire-grate must have been left upon them.

"There will be two of us, Robbie. Wherever you go, I am going as well."

"Tinwhumps, what I am doing is for the best, you must listen to reason."

"I'm listening."

"Wherever I go, it must be alone now."

"No fear, I shall follow behind in the snow with a basket. Don't you remember the picture, 'In his Master's steps he trod'?"

Suddenly, Aping-Ayres threw back his head and laughed long and heartily. The entire picture of poverty seemed to have changed, somehow, and he felt as though, unexpectedly, hope had returned again to him, and his laughter had a joyful ring in it.

CHAPTER XX

HOW A BOOK CAME TO BE WRITTEN

"ROBBIE," observed Tinwhumpinny, one evening, as he knelt upon the shabby leather sofa and regarded the tree which adorned the porch outside 107, Church Street, through the open window, whilst he drummed the lattice panes with his knuckles, "I don't know whether it is owing to the advent of early spring, but I certainly have an idea."

"That is not a novelty in itself, Tinwhumps, for it seems to me that you are always full of them."

"But, Robbie, this one is really startling."

"My dear Tinwhumps," expostulated Aping-Ayres, "your ideas are invariably startling, occasionally almost uncomfortable."

"Robbie, what a horrid definition!"

"Yet," observed Aping-Ayres, "I feel it to be truth in the abstract, and surely that is a quite reasonable thing to attempt."

"I am not sure, Robbie, that it *is* reasonable, to limp through life with only the choice of two evils, either being condemned as a humourist or considered perpetually rude."

Aping-Ayres grinned, and continued to fill his well-burned briar pipe.

"Which category do I come under, Tinwhumps?"

"Neither, Robbie," chuckled Tinwhumpinny, "you are too evasive to be actually rude, and your humour won't have any real chance of expanding itself, because my idea is really quite serious."

"Humph!" remarked Aping-Ayres. "What will the idea

necessitate? Lots of money, which we don't possess? Flights of fancy into space, which I shall find impossible to follow, or the world's ridicule, that I may be totally unable to face?"

"A sort of combination of all you have mentioned, Robbie, plus awful hard work."

"How dreadful!" groaned Aping-Ayres. "I somehow felt convinced it would be something quite impossible for me to undertake."

Tinwhumpinny left off drumming the window-pane and seated himself upon the sofa directly facing Aping-Ayres.

That worthy always realized that Tinwhumpinny meant business whenever he settled himself in this deliberate way for the purpose of conversation.

"Robbie," commenced Tinwhumpinny, "you want money badly, don't you? I might have said *we* want it, for we both come into it."

"But we don't come into it, that is what I object to," replied Aping-Ayres, plaintively.

"Robbie, don't be flippant. I've thought of a way you could make some money for a dead certainty."

"In that case, Tinwhumps, you have beaten me, for I have thought out and tried every conceivable plan for the acquisition of gold until my brain is sick, and my mind refuses temporarily to arrange itself for victory upon a battle-field abounding with sordid possibilities.

"My mind, Tinwhumps," continued Aping-Ayres, focussing his eye-glass upon the open lattice window which Tinwhumpinny had so lately vacated, "resembles that most offensive blind, which will neither lift up nor come down, which neither the Wildgoose nor her spouse will trouble about, and which has a nail right through it, making its crookedness all the more hideously apparent."

Tinwhumpinny looked at the blind in question, contemplatively. "Yes, Robbie, but a little oil, a piece of new cord, one small wheel, together with the fact that it isn't left entirely to itself, would really make it quite a workable and self-respecting blind, don't you think?"

"Painfully true, O Tinwhumps," agreed Aping-Ayres.

"It would," proceeded Tinwhumpinny, "have saved

innumerable wasted curses every morning, as you vainly endeavoured to draw it up for breakfast, and the same painful repetition every time you failed to pull it down at night, to say nothing of removing from it the stigma of hardened indifference to its own uselessness."

"Yet," observed Aping-Ayres, "I have treated that blind kindly. I have coaxed it, Tinwhumps; I have found it a most unresponsive blind, deaf to all my overtures."

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "Robbie," he said, "we have a'll left it absolutely alone."

"But, Tinwhumps," urged Aping-Ayres, "isn't that the aim and object of every single thing in life, to be let alone?"

Tinwhumpinny shook his head. "Some things must never be let alone; if they are, well, they are just nailed up for good, and they stop like that."

"Granting that piece of philosophy to be correct, Tinwhumps, let us return to the scheme for making money, if you actually know of any means of doing so, for Heaven's sake unfold it instantly."

"You remember some of the long winter evenings, Robbie?"

"Good gracious!" moaned Aping-Ayres, "shall I ever forget them, and all we had to go without, to say nothing of the hand-to-mouth existence we have been condemned to lead upon occasional sums derived from my short stories?"

"Oh, come, Robbie, we weren't so badly off, you know, and it might have been worse: luck was sometimes against us."

"Always," interrupted Aping-Ayres, "always, I fear, Tinwhumps."

"Anyway, I wasn't referring to that, Robbie. I was thinking of something in particular that was always wonderful."

"What?" enquired Aping-Ayres, curiously.

"When you would not let me open a single book or study at all, you supplied the place of books, Robbie, when you told me those wonderful stories."

"Aping-Ayres stopped smoking for a moment, and watched Tinwhumpinny, who crossed to where some piles of manuscript paper, two quill pens, and a penny bottle of ink fought for a slippery foothold amidst the sliding disorder of Aping-Ayres' writing-table.

Aping-Ayres still continued to watch Tinwhumpinny as he sorted the articles and brought them over to where he sat, and placed them upon the ink-stained table in front of him.

"Robbie?"

"Yes, Tinwhumps."

"Write those stories as you told them to me. Oh! Robbie, put in all the colour and the poetry that you gave me, and do you think that they would not sell?"

"But, Tinwhumps, I don't think I——"

"Oh yes you can, Robbie, and I shall be here to prompt, for I remember every one of them."

"Short stories don't sell, Tinwhumps: publishers do not want them."

"They will want these, Robbie."

"But, Tinwhumps, what could I call the book?"

"You will write it, Robbie, all except the title, and I am going to write that."

Tinwhumpinny took one of the clean sheets of manuscript paper, and dipping the quill pen in the ink, scrawled a sentence upon the centre of the paper, and putting a wriggling line underneath, by way of making it distinctive, handed it to Aping-Ayres.

Aping-Ayres took the paper thoughtfully, and read the words, "Tales that I told Tinwhumpinny."

"Tinwhumps," he said, "I believe you are right."

"You will do the book, Robbie?"

"Yes, old chap."

"Now, right off?"

"Yes, but it will be your book."

"It will be everybody's book, Robbie, and what does it matter so long as you do it, for you will have written it, after all, won't you?"

"Yes, after you had shown me how, but I will try to write it, Tinwhumps."

"Start it at once."

"Yes."

"And write one chapter at least every day, and perhaps more if you feel inspired."

"I don't quite know about feeling inspired, Tinwhumps."

"Well, of course not, no one ever quite knows, even when one is."

"Tinwhumps," observed Aping-Ayres, as he reflectively nibbled the feathered end of a quill, "I wonder what rare collection of fairy folk hovered over you at your birth."

"What makes you suppose they did?" asked Tinwhumpinny.

"Well, they evidently brought you strange gifts when they gave you imagination, poetry, and intelligence. They must have been an odd collection who assisted at that function, Tinwhumps."

"Not stranger, Robbie, than an ox and an ass, who were once present upon another occasion. Why, Robbie, you've started to write."

"Yes, you gave me the very idea for the first story in your words just now; and, Tinwhumps, what a lovely fairy story it will make!"

"Because you know it is true."

"Yes, Tinwhumps, because I know it is true."

CHAPTER XXI

A LITTLE BOHEMIAN

FROM time immemorial the youthful male offsprings, and sometimes even the female offsprings, of ladies and gentlemen have always shown a decided predilection for playing in the streets, however select their parentage and upbringing may have been.

That the particular district may be either Belgravia, Mayfair, Chelsea, or Brixton, really makes very little difference.

Aping-Ayres, as he sat, mornings or evenings, writing at his open church-shaped windows, was fully aware that Tinwhumpinny played both hockey and football in the street, with other boys of his own age, sufficiently well brought up for Aping-Ayres to approve of.

Moreover, upon one occasion Aping-Ayres had been known to pay up the sum of five shillings like a gentleman, for a broken downstairs' window, and had not even troubled to enquire the name of the delinquent.

Tinwhumpinny could run like a hare, but he never shrieked, shouted, or yelled, and in this particular respect Aping-Ayres sometimes wished that his playfellows could observe and follow this admirable example.

"I like to see him playing," Aping-Ayres would mutter, approvingly, "and, without a doubt, all those kids prefer the publicity of Church Street to the privacy of their own back gardens as a playground; possibly home experience has taught them that it affords fewer restrictions."

Occasionally, Aping-Ayres would have to collect Tinwhumpinny from a breathless, scuffling crowd, and pounce

upon him in order to bear him away to either lunch or dinner. More often than not this was the signal for the stopping of the game, and if ever Aping-Ayres happened to be in funds, a delicate distribution of largesse for the purpose of purchasing sweets, would nearly always consummate a friendly treaty, whereby Tinwhumpinny was allowed to depart from among his fellows without reproaches.

Upon one of these occasions, Tinwhumpinny, after having sufficiently regained his breath, announced to Aping-Ayres that he had an invitation for both of them.

"Indeed," said Aping-Ayres.

"You know Grimes, Robbie?"

Aping-Ayres considered for a space. "No," he admitted, "I cannot say I know Grimes."

"Well, Robbie," volunteered Tinwhumpinny, "he is the chap who plays with us who gets the most goals."

"And who, doubtless, shouts the loudest," interrupted Aping-Ayres.

"Yes, and his pater owns the big white house, with the great garden at the back, that we see the tree-tops of from our back windows."

"Indeed, and are we invited to assist your friend to score goals in the street, or to look at his father's trees; which, I ask you, Tinwhumpinny?"

"Well, Robbie, the latter, among other things. We are both asked to the garden-party his pater and mater are giving, day after to-morrow. It is going to be quite a grand affair."

Aping-Ayres demurred.

"I don't think either of us possess the sort of raiment for a function like that, Tinwhumps, and," added Aping-Ayres, as he made a rapid survey of their united costumes, the result of which was far from encouraging, "you know our wardrobe at the present moment is really not in a first-class condition."

"Let us go just as we are, Robbie," urged Tinwhumpinny. "Nobody will notice us, for, as you know, lots and lots of very rich people are quite shabby, aren't they?"

"Yes," admitted Aping-Ayres. "But still, you know, Tinwhumps, this will be more or less of a parade."

"Well, we will parade with the rest, and I'm sure we shall pass."

"Well, Tinwhumps, upon this occasion I will give in to you, for I do not want to disappoint you, but why are you so anxious to go?"

"I have a scheme, Robbie."

"What sort of scheme?" inquired Aping-Ayres; "can it be communicated?"

"No, Robbie, for the present it is a very, very great secret indeed."

"Humph!" said Aping-Ayres. "Is it of a nature likely to land me in a series of hopeless difficulties?"

"No, Robbie, I shall not disgrace you, you leave it all to me."

"Very well, I suppose you will enlighten me in your own good time."

"If my plan comes to pass I will," asserted Tinwhumpinny, "but if it doesn't work out I shall keep a discreet silence, in the face of defeat."

"Indeed," answered Aping-Ayres; "then I take it you have some definite thing in view which you wish to gain."

"Rather, I should jolly well think I had," whereupon Tinwhumpinny, at the risk of being considered mysterious, refused to impart any more information whatever upon the subject.

Tinwhumpinny had been quite correct in his description concerning the garden of the White House, where the garden-party was to be held, for it was, undoubtedly, one of the biggest private gardens to be found anywhere in London.

He had been equally accurate in his surmise that among so many people the well-worn aspect of their clothes would escape remark.

There was nothing particularly unusual in that a small boy's tweed jacket and knickerbockers should be quite worn out at the elbows and the knees, any more than a probability that the stateliness of Aping-Ayres was in no way marred, even by trousers that bagged, together with a coat and waistcoat which, undoubtedly, had seen better days.

Aping-Ayres was perhaps a trifle shocked to find the refreshments provided were to be of the lightest description,

consisting solely of tea and dainty cakes, or, for those who preferred them, claret-cup, ices and delicate sandwiches.

Neither would it be overstating the case to say Aping-Ayres was making up his mind to be distinctly bored when he found the feature of the garden-party was to be mixed sports, where any or all of the guests could enter for any event they might choose.

"Barbarous entertainment," reflected Aping-Ayres, as he looked helplessly at the elaborate card of events, and absent-mindedly nibbled the gaily coloured pencil attached to it. "Imagine me making a fool of myself before all these people; why on earth did Tinwhumpinny insist upon dragging me to assist at such a deplorable afternoon, it was really not at all considerate of him."

As Mrs. Grimes, whose sole anxiety was to make her garden-party a great success, had expended over seventy pounds upon costly prizes, mostly valuable silver articles, she only considered it quite natural that her own young offspring and Tinwhumpinny should be more than ordinarily absorbed in wonder and delight as they assisted a maid-servant to arrange these trophies upon a long table at the end of the lawn.

The dear and worthy lady might have been amused, but she would certainly have been greatly amazed, could she have guessed the real reason why her son's small playfellow looked so long and earnestly at three particularly good silver prizes, the labels attached to each one announcing plainly that they were to be bestowed upon the winner of the sack race, chalking the line, and the hundred yards race respectively.

"I'm so glad you like the prizes, dear," confided Mrs. Grimes to Tinwhumpinny.

"They are the finest I have ever seen," answered Tinwhumpinny.

"No one is allowed, of course, to take more than three."

"I should think three would be quite enough," answered Tinwhumpinny.

"Now don't you think, dear, any one who wins them will be lucky?"

"Yes," said Tinwhumpinny, enigmatically, "I do."

Aping-Ayres, who was wandering round the grounds,

regretting the fact that he had ever turned up at all at such a fête, suddenly felt a tug at his coat, and became aware that Tinwhumpinny was beside him, flushed with excitement, and whispering things that were of really great importance, to Tinwhumpinny at any rate.

"Robbie?"

"Yes."

"I didn't mean to tell you, but I can't keep it to myself any longer, it's really the most amusing thing I ever knew."

"Amusing?" drawled Aping-Ayres. "In what way? Why, I'm bored to death."

"Wait till I've explained to you, then you'll be simply tickled to death. First of all, have you noticed the people?"

"No," replied Aping-Ayres, shortly, "I haven't, they don't interest me, not a single one of them."

"They interest me awfully," confided Tinwhumpinny.

"Whatever for?"

"Well, I'll explain the second part of the joke first, and then get back to the people afterwards. You know I went to Chevister to school?"

"Of course."

"Well, there was a boy there, named O'Malley, he was Irish, and his father was a Commander on one of the battleships."

"What on earth has that got to do with this garden-party?"

"Listen, O'Malley, who was my age, didn't know Cæsar from Virgil, but he did two things better than any one I have seen, and he showed us how to do them. He could win a sack race against any one I ever met, and he could keep his balance to chalk a line further than any one else. The sailors had put him up to all the tricks when they had sports on his father's ship."

"Tinwhumpinny, I may be very dense, but I cannot understand how Master O'Malley's accomplishments, to say nothing of his father's naval position, can in any way alter the dullness of this garden party."

Tinwhumpinny danced a small war-dance at his friend's elbow.

"I told you I was coming back to the people," laughed Tinwhumpinny. "Oh Robbie, Robbie! Look at them. Did you ever see such a collection of dear old crocks in your life, some who have never run at all, and others who ought never to attempt it even, and—and, don't you see, Robbie, those three prizes, the most valuable of the lot, are practically mine?"

Here Tinwhumpinny was so convulsed with merriment that he could only gasp out, "I almost feel I have got them under false pretences."

Aping-Ayres began to laugh, in spite of himself, for Tinwhumpinny's mirth, although very unusual, was infectious.

"You haven't got them yet, old man."

"Robbie, do you seriously suppose any one here can do the hundred yards even?"

"After witnessing some of your exhibitions in Church Street I'm inclined to think you are right," opined Aping-Ayres, "but what are the prizes, and why do you want them?"

Tinwhumpinny, ignoring the second half of the question, ticked off the items upon his fingers, one by one.

"Sack race, a heavy silver double cigarette and cigar box, cost over six pounds according to Grimes Junior. Chalking the line, a heavy silver claret jug, cost the same price. The hundred yards, a solid silver cigarette case, also the same price."

"Humph!" commented Aping-Ayres, "and as you do not either smoke or drink, I should imagine they would be very useful presents for you."

Tinwhumpinny regarded Aping-Ayres with a merry twinkle in his eyes. "You will see why I want them," he said. "There goes the first bell, now to enter the lists."

"If he imagines," quoth Aping-Ayres to himself, "that those articles will be of the slightest use to present to me, without the means in my pocket to fill any one of them, I am afraid poor Tinwhumps is doomed to be disappointed, only I shall, of course, pretend to like them, and I have little doubt that their presence in Church Street will be a constant source of joy to him if he wins them. So that was the reason he wanted to come here so much; I suppose Grimes Junior had

been vaunting the gorgeousness of the silver tokens in advance."

Nobody could be blamed, in the earlier part of the programme at any rate, for considering Tinwhumpinny very below the average in most of the sports.

At throwing the hammer he was hopeless, since it was many yards short of anybody else who had competed for the event.

His jumping was, perhaps, little short of a disgrace. Every mixed event found him far behind. He even retired from the miniature steeplechase.

Throwing the cricket ball being easily won by Grimes Junior, that worthy found fit to remonstrate good-naturedly with Tinwhumpinny.

"I say, it's an awful pity, but you won't get anything. I thought you would be much better."

Aping-Ayres could not be said to be any more consoling.

"Tinwhumps," remarked Aping-Ayres, "you have made a sorry display; I commence to fear that athletics are not your strong point."

"You wait," whispered Tinwhumpinny, "until my events come on."

Aping-Ayres fixed his eye-glass firmly in one eye, and did what his small protégé bid him.

"This boy," declared one of the starters, indicating Tinwhumpinny, "certainly ought to have a good start in the sack race."

"Oh no," answered Tinwhumpinny, innocently, "I will start level with the others."

"Anyway, that's very sporting of you," said the starter, as he continued to help young men and maidens, old men and children, into sacks.

Tinwhumpinny looked long and fixedly at the far end of the lawn, where a bright ribbon hung from two croquet sticks, denoted the winning post, and he even chuckled quietly, as they put his sack over him.

"Good gracious," exclaimed Aping-Ayres to himself, after the start, "why it's a blooming walk-over, nobody near him why, he's crammed his feet into the corners and he's *running* in the bally thing."



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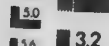
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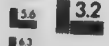
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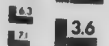
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"Humph!" muttered Aping-Ayres, as Tinwhumpinny rolled over the ribbon, before most of the competitors had separated themselves from an inextricable heap, "the double silver cigarette box is his safe enough."

Later on, Aping-Ayres was the first to admit that the hundred yards was his likewise.

Moreover, chalking the line was a triumph, for Tinwhumpinny did not even wobble.

"Evidently there was much virtue and wisdom in the teaching of the young O'Malley," pondered Aping-Ayres, "and there's no doubt that Tinwhumps really deserves his eighteen pounds' worth of prizes. I wonder what he is going to do with them?"

When they bid the host and hostess good-bye, Aping-Ayres carried the silver with stately grace, and Mr. Grimes Senior pinched Tinwhumpinny's ear. "Why, after all, old chap, you were a dark horse," he said, laughingly.

"They were the only three things I could do," observed Tinwhumpinny.

"By Jove!" said Grimes Junior, "you got the three best prizes, too."

"I'm afraid they are," said Tinwhumpinny.

Upon arriving at Church Street, Tinwhumpinny declared he wished to show his prizes to some one.

Aping-Ayres, considering this a most natural request, handed over the somewhat heavy booty, and retired to his room, devoutly wishing the refreshments at the White House had been of a more substantial nature, for Aping-Ayres was mindful of the fact that there was no supper.

Aping-Ayres did not regret this state of things so much upon his own account, but he was wondering how he should break the news to Tinwhumpinny.

Still pondering this difficult proposition, the sound of flying footsteps scattering up the stairs informed him that Tinwhumpinny was arriving in haste.

Tinwhumpinny burst the door open, and flew straight at Aping-Ayres, and before that worthy could pull himself together, had emptied six glittering, jingling sovereigns into that astonished gentleman's lap.

Tinwhumpinny, breathless, wild with excitement, and half-incoherent, was explaining that Pieters, the pawn-shop at the corner, had given him a third of their value.

"I worked hard for it, Robbie, didn't I, and it's ours; and can't we go and have a good blow-out, don't you think, at the South Kensington Restaurant, we've had such a lot of home-made food-stuffs lately?"

"Tinwhumps," said Aping-Ayres, and there was an odd break in his voice. "Oh! Tinwhumps, you—you little Bohemian!"

Tinwhumpinny looked at Aping-Ayres as reproachfully as if he had been guilty of uttering a blasphemy.

"Why, Robbie," he said, "surely you never thought that I was anything else, did you? What a supper we will have; and that was my secret. I believe, for a moment, Pieters the pawnbroker was almost suspicious of me; he asked me how I came by them."

"What did you say?" gasped Aping-Ayres.

"Referred him to the tickets of prize events hanging upon each of them, and I have never seen him laugh like that before. He seemed quite jolly, and he was still laughing when I grabbed the gold and bolted home. I couldn't wait to ask him what the joke was."

So it came to pass that two of life's Bohemians went out and had their supper.

BOOK III
DAYS IN ORPINGTON

CHAPTER XXII

THINGS THAT MONEY CAN BRING AND THINGS THAT MONEY CANNOT BRING

"TINWHUMPS, Tinwhumps!" shouted Mr. Ayres, excitedly, before he was well inside the wide hall-door of No. 107, Church Street. Some event had undoubtedly happened out of the ordinary that Aping-Ayres, usually the most imperturbable of persons, should allow such outward evidence of excitement to escape him, to say nothing of the ring of hope in the voice of Mr. Ayres.

Promptly, in answer to the summons, Tinwhumps appeared at the top of the high, perpendicular stairs.

"Look out, Robbie, I'm going to jump!"

"Don't!" implored Ayres, "you'll break your back, or your neck, or perhaps," added Ayres, hopefully, "both our necks."

"Not if you catch me properly." Whereupon Tinwhumps dived, and, being satisfactorily and scientifically caught by Ayres, was borne aloft in triumph.

"Of course, something's happened," commenced Tinwhumpinny, after a breathless ascent.

"Tinwhumps, you'll never guess."

"I'm not going to try; I'm going to listen; I know it's good news, and we want cheering up, don't we, Robbie?"

"Humph," replied Ayres, "I never noticed that you were particularly dull."

"Have you ever heard, Robbie," remarked Tinwhumpinny, contemplatively, "how they punish people in China who are irritating enough not to make a straightforward confession at once?"

"Don't they twist their pigtails?" enquired Mr. Ayres, not without some misgivings.

"Quite right; you have guessed it. Now, you see, although you don't possess that particular attraction"—here Tinwhumpinny grinned maliciously—"you have a forelock of hair, just beginning to grow grizzled because you will work so late at night, and it would be so painful to have it twisted round and round and——"

"I give in," announced Mr. Ayres, with just the necessary touch of right humility. "Well, Tinwhumps, what would you say if I told you we were rich?"

"I don't think I particularly want to be rich, we have mostly all we want."

"Well, but how do you suppose riches have descended upon me?"

"As the gentle rain from heaven?" enquired Tinwhumpinny, with another grin.

"No, I've sold the book."

"Robbie!"

"Yes," shouted Mr. Ayres, in triumph, "I've sold it to Mathers, the publishers, for a hundred pounds."

"Hurrah! Oh, Robbie, why, it's lots of money."

"Of course it is. And do you know what I am going to do with it, Tinwhumps, eh?"

"Squander it," replied Tinwhumpinny, promptly.

"Certainly not," announced Ayres, with dignity. "You see, you brought me luck. You suggested writing the book; your name is on the title-page. 'Tales that I told Tinwhumpinny' is going to be a huge success, and behold, you shall benefit thereby; for lo!" continued Ayres, with enthusiasm, "there lies nestling in Kent a place called Orpington, where strawberries abound in millions, where there are woods to wander in, and wild flowers galore to pick, and where I am going to take you and make you a fat, healthy boy, instead of feeding you upon tinned meats in Church Street, and watch you grow white and thin and hungry."

From his seat of vantage upon Mr. Ayres's shoulders, Tinwhumpinny surveyed himself critically in the dingy mirror,

which Mrs. Wildgoose always forgot to dust, by reason of its being placed too high up.

"Judging from appearances," said Tinwhumpinny, with assumed gravity, "I seem to be perfectly healthy—what's the matter with me?"

"You want fresh air," declared Mr. Ayres, "and oh, infant prodigy, you are going to have it in abundance, and I am going to inflate your juvenile lungs with it all day long."

"It sounds like blowing out a football," laughed Tinwhumpinny; "but the strawberries will be a great scheme, won't they, Robbie? How many do you suppose we can eat between us?"

"I intend to ascertain without delay; I am absorbed in the idea to the exclusion of everything else; I only know that the train starts from Charing Cross at 2.30. You pack your extremely grubby drill sailor suits, which won't appear quite so disgracefully dirty in the country, in the horrible carpet bag which Reginaldo left behind him as a legacy, and I'll endeavour to make the overstrained straps of my portmanteau meet across the top.

"The country surrounding Orpington is full of beautiful interest," commenced Mr. Ayres, with the manner of one delivering a recitation. "Lord Avebury, once Sir John Lubbock, who wrote upon Ants, has his country abiding-place near there. A lovely park, close at hand, belonging to the Earl of Derry, contains the tree where Wilberforce and Pitt discussed the abolition of slavery; a peaceful village church upon a slope contains the grave of——"

Tinwhumpinny was here heard to remark, as he clambered down, and vanished to carry out his particular part of the programme, that if he listened to all Mr. Ayres recounted from the guide-book there would be no packing done, no start made, and a lost train at the finish.

These minor details having been duly carried out, and the first part of the programme having been satisfactorily accomplished, it came to pass that two wayfarers, dripping with perspiration from their efforts in carrying two overlaiden bags, arrived, flushed, but triumphant before a clematis-covered cottage overlooking one of the many strawberry fields of Orpington.

"You have rooms?" inquired Mr. Ayres.

"Yes, sir. How many do you require?"

"Three—a sitting-room and two bedrooms."

"Yes, sir, we have them, and they are to let, and they are very clean and comfortable, sir."

"Of course they are," replied Mr. Ayres, imperturbably; "otherwise, my dear lady, I should not have knocked."

"I can tell you all the places of interest round, sir," commenced the landlady, after terms had been satisfactorily arranged.

"Thank you so much," said Tinwhumpinny, "but we read all the guide-book coming down in the train."

"Robbie," urged Tinwhumpinny, "just look out of this window; they are picking the strawberries now, and we ought to be eating them."

"And we will after I have had a wash."

"Oh, wash afterwards; we shall need it, because we shall get thoroughly messy, you know."

"I'm convinced you will," rejoined Mr. Ayres, with great conviction.

"Perhaps, Robbie, we shall be able to stay through the summer for the haymaking?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ayres, thoughtfully, "and so enable us to bid farewell to the last relics of respectability of your two drill suits."

"I shall get up every morning at five."

Mr. Ayres groaned. "It is your one dreadful habit, Tinwhumps; but I beg of you, if you entertain any regard whatsoever for my comfort, and taking in consideration that wasps, gnats, earwigs, and moths may have played around my pillow, converting my bedchamber into a sort of Midsummer Night's Dream, that I may be allowed to repose in peace, undisturbed, until such hour in the morning as I feel strong enough to arise and greet the morn."

"Oh, you'll feel strong enough here," announced Tinwhumpinny, confidently, "why, it's a heavenly place."

"I hope so," hesitated Mr. Ayres, "but I require a lot of sleep."

"Anyway, I shan't disturb you."

"But you do, Tinwhumps," urged Mr. Ayres, plaintively, "you know you sing in the morning regularly."

"Well, don't you like to hear me sing?" demanded Tinwhumpinny.

"Yes," admitted Mr. Ayres, "I d n't mind a little of it."

"All right, but if I sing too loud, keep on sleeping, and try to imagine it's only your guardian angel somewhere in attendance."

"Perhaps you're right," answered Mr. Ayres, thoughtfully, then, in an undertone of sudden conviction, the significance of which he was only just beginning to understand, he repeated his words, "Perhaps you're right, Tinwhumps."

Before Mr. Ayres departed for the strawberry fields, the landlady knocked at the door of the sitting-room, and entered.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the little boy, and he is such a dear little boy, has coaxed me into making you both a currant pudding out of the currants in the garden, every day, regularly."

"Humph," muttered Mr. Ayres, "aren't they—aren't they rather indigestible, don't you think?"

"Good and plain, sir, and they can't hurt a child."

"Yes, but you see," explained Mr. Ayres, "he is not an ordinary child."

"Lor, sir, you needn't tell me that, one can hear that by the way he talks. Is he your own little boy, sir?"

"Yes," announced Tinwhumpinny, who had entered in time to hear the landlady's last question, and interposed before any explanation could be given, or the likelihood of any misunderstanding whatsoever taking place. "Yes, I am—Now and ever shall be, World without end, Amen."

The astonished landlady, as she departed, had some sort of recollection that she had heard the words before, yet somehow imagined that she must have heard them in church, but was not quite clear in her own mind whether they formed only part of the marriage service, or a portion of the order for the burial of the dead.

"A dear kid," murmured the landlady to herself, "but I ain't never met any one like 'im, and I don't suppose I ever

shall again." In all probability the worthy soul was quite right in her assumption.

Under the trees fringing the end of the strawberry plantation Tinwhumpinny gave a great sigh of satisfaction, and looked quizzically across at Mr. Ayres, who had fed to repletion.

"It is almost Biblical," announced Tinwhumpinny, solemnly. "Five baskets full, and nothing remains."

"Tinwhumps," rejoined Mr. Ayres, "there are various sorts of pigs to be found everywhere in the country."

"Yes," said Tinwhumpinny, "but they do differ in the selection of their diet, which, I suppose, shows some of them to be of a superior class."

Mr. Ayres grinned contentedly. "Oh, Tinwhumps," he said, "you are wonderful, but how I wish you were not so uncannily sharp."

"Why?"

"Because it sometimes gives me shivers when I think that your intelligence seems stretched and stretched beyond the ordinary limits to get the last ounce out of it as it were."

"But intelligence has to be used, the same as other things, hasn't it?"

For once Mr. Ayres remained silent.

"What book have you got there? You know, Tinwhumps, all books for you are taboo."

"It's Walter Pater."

Mr. Ayres sat bolt upright upon the grass.

"Which particular book?" inquired the amazed Mr. Ayres.

"The Renaissance; why, don't you know that one of my tutors brought me up on Walter Pater and Cardinal Newman. Cardinal Newman only departed because some one or other in the household suddenly discovered that he belonged to the Catholic Church, though what difference that could make I never did understand. Walter Pater remained, and although it was carefully drummed into me that a work of his even contained one split infinitive, it never had the least effect of spoiling it for me, and I shouldn't have cared if it had contained dozens, for, Robbie, he was one of the greatest artists who ever lived, wasn't he?"

"Good Lord," groaned the afflicted Mr. Ayres.

"Why do you groan, Robbie?"

"I groan, Tinwhumps, because it is impossible, under the circumstances, to take the people who brought you up and crammed you like this, and stuff them into boiling oil."

"Kobble, what a mediæval wish."

"Yes," concluded Mr. Ayres, indignantly, "put them into boiling oil, and keep them there."

"Well, they haven't done me any harm."

"No," said Mr. Ayres, "and that is where the miracle comes in. Here, give me that book, Tinwhumps, and don't you let me see you read another book until I tell you."

"Here it is, I don't want to read, so long as you talk to me."

Once more Mr. Ayres emitted the semblance of a groan. "How on earth am I ever going to bring you up, Tinwhumps! I can't talk to a child the way a child ought to be talked to day by day."

"Oh can't you though, how about 'Tales I told Tinwhumpinny'? I don't know anybody else who can talk to me like you do, and I don't want to know them, even if they could."

"Humph," grunted Mr. Ayres, "you seem to think everything I do is right."

"Yes," nodded Tinwhumpinny, "everything you do is right."

CHAPTER XXIII

MORE THINGS THAT MONEY CANNOT BRING

As one happy day succeeded another, and whilst the bright weeks, so full of outpoured sunshine, slipped all too quickly away, Aping-Ayres, and the prodigy whom he had adopted, enjoyed to their full measure every benefit the fresh unspoiled country could bestow upon them.

They were furnished with a sum of money from the sale of the book which seemed to be almost like unlimited riches when compared with the struggles and poverty and want they had latterly shared uncomplainingly, like the good Bohemians they were, in Chelsea.

This especial period of being in low water had left no ill-effect whatever upon Tinwhumpinny, Aping-Ayres had always seen to that, whilst the only effects upon himself, outwardly at any rate, were perhaps the addition of a few more grey hairs, together with an anxious line or two upon his face.

The face of a man could, with much truth, be likened to an engraver's plate, different acids eat into it, and have a habit of leaving their marks upon it; sometimes marring it, oftentimes making it more beautiful.

It did not take long for any one possessing the intelligence of Aping-Ayres to discover that he had in reality taken charge, so to speak, of a strange and wonderful little life.

That this life, unfolding before him, had wrought gradual yet stupendous changes in the life and habits of Mr. Ayres, that gentleman no longer doubted.

The constant companionship of Tinwhumpinny, his thoughts, and the often unique expression of them, struck Mr.

Ayres, if such a thing were possible, as being even more remarkable in the country than they had been in London.

The knowledge of Mr. Ayres concerning wild flowers and birds could never have been in any way remarkable, yet seeing these things anew through the eyes of Tinwhumpinny, Mr. Ayres began to discover that he would soon acquire sufficient knowledge to write a book upon the subject, should he ever care to do so.

Mr. Ayres could never have been described, by the most eulogistic of his friends, as ever having possessed any leaning whatever towards spirituality in any form, yet Mr. Ayres was gradually seeing things from a spiritual point of view, and, moreover, becoming absorbed in the process, much to his own amazement.

Mr. Ayres knew now that he listened eagerly to every thought or expression that Tinwhumpinny gave him, and in doing so he knew that he was keeping his own intellect clearer and brighter than it had ever been before, in order that he might give again to Tinwhumpinny some new thought, sometimes original, and more often beautiful, in order to ease his own mind of the very idea that the benefits were all being conferred upon one side.

As Aping-Ayres looked back upon those long country rambles, beside hedgerows, over moors and commons, and in great woods, he acknowledged in his own heart, and sometimes not without a strange feeling of shame, that the only glimpse he had ever had in his life concerning anything holy, he had received through this child; in like fashion, his first real insight into Nature arose from the same source.

The wine-cup no longer claimed Aping-Ayres as a devotee, nor was he ever now seen in the hopeless, bedraggled company who straggle slipshod among the throng that worship Bacchus.

The one good book of his life he had written almost with the very eyes of Tinwhumpinny, as surely as if his firm, childish hand had guided his pen.

All that was quaint and wonderful had come from him; that much Aping-Ayres knew.

With a sense of strange satisfaction stealing over him, Aping-Ayres realized that his best work would not stop at that

one book. Short stories, such as he had never written before, were being accepted. A new need for work had arisen in his life, a wild, exalted hope that he might attain and claim the success he should have claimed years before, uplifted him and bore him along in a sort of triumphant progress; and Ayres knew the reason, and the wherefor, and, probably for the first time in his life, thanked his God for the gift. All, all he knew came from the fact that he wanted Tinwhumpinny to be proud of him, because he meant to make enough to keep him in comfort, without the danger of their ever slipping back into the slough of poverty and hopelessness which had so nearly overtaken them.

"I've always been in debt, one way and another," mused Ayres, "and they certainly never troubled me, but I have a debt here that I shall never be able to repay."

With the strange simplicity of mind, which formed one of Aping-Ayres' greatest charms, it never struck him that Tinwhumpinny thought exactly the same thing with regard to his own small life; that Tinwhumpinny considered himself irrecoverably in Mr. Ayres' debt, and was trying to pay it off in his own childish way, with all the love and gratitude that it was possible for him to give.

So the strange mutual love and dependence grew deeper day by day between two of life's "odd men out," whom nobody appeared to need particularly, yet who needed each other so much, that it would have been impossible even to surmise which gave most unto the other, for there was never any such reckoning between them.

With regard to religion or morals, Mr. Ayres was content to leave both alone. He believed that Tinwhumpinny possessed as much of both as was possible in this world; moreover, Aping-Ayres felt, with regard to these subjects, he was only himself in the position of a beginner, slowly learning the first strokes in swimming.

With regard to education, Ayres regretted daily that Tinwhumpinny had learned more than enough to last him for the rest of his life.

Whenever Ayres got to the solving of the problem of Tinwhumpinny's future, he would be observed to polish and

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repolish his single eye-glass to a brilliancy which formed a complete contrast with his actual thoughts upon the subject, which might have been described as quite foggy.

It was upon this great point that Ayres always found himself to be utterly and completely lost.

"Of course," reasoned Ayres with himself, "he might have been trained for a musician, he will certainly be a great poet or writer, but what in the world am I to do about it, how on earth am I to train him, and for what? Will some chance word of mine decide it all? If it does, will it be for the best? Shall I have done my duty?"

Then, last of all, he would always conclude with, "Fate will decide."

Yes, Aping-Ayres, "Fate will decide." Something greater and stronger than you shapes the destiny alike, of all things great and small, even the sparrow.

It took Aping-Ayres many years before he learned that lesson.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REVEREND CATHCART GRANT—HOW HE RECEIVED A SHOCK

"ROBBIE, there's ever such a nice chap waiting to see you, he was up at Oxford with you, and he's the vicar of the next-door parish, and he called to look you up, only you were out."

"What's his name?" inquired Mr. Ayres.

"The Reverend Cathcart Grant."

"Oh, good indeed, I haven't seen him for ages."

"He's ever so nice," said Tinwhumpinny, "we had no end of a long talk together, over two hours."

"What—er—what about?" inquired Mr. Ayres, not without certain misgivings, upon remembering the visitor's calling, taken in conjunction with some of Tinwhumpinny's most odd beliefs.

"Oh, almost everything. I'm off now for a bit, to feed the fowls."

"Anyway," mused Mr. Ayres, "if Tinwhumpinny hasn't totally paralysed his brains he knows the worst, at any rate, and it will save me no end of explanations."

The old, happy, careless days at Oxford seemed to come back as the two friends greeted each other in the little upstairs sitting-room, both of them were still young men, but even the intervening years which separated their early youth from them seemed to vanish for a while now they had met again.

"I have every reason to believe that you are long-suffering," laughed Aping-Ayres, "but I gather, from an indefinable expression upon your face, that the strain of being entertained for two hours by Tinwhumpinny has told upon you heavily."

Cathcart Grant's only reply was to give himself a species of mental and physical shake.

"Have some tea," suggested Ayres, affably, as he turned to the ready-spread tea-table.

"Thanks," replied the young Vicar, absently.

"Milk?"

"Thanks," repeated the Vicar as he even more absently took the small silver jug, containing the domestic liquid referred to, and gently poured a portion of the contents over the white table-cloth, well to the side of his cup.

Aping-Ayres grinned.

The expression upon the face of Cathcart Grant continued to be that of a man whose entire views of life have been thoroughly upset.

Ayres mopped up the small running rivulet of milk without comment.

"I hope," suggested Aping-Ayres, with yet another grin, "you *were* entertained."

"Well," replied the Vicar, slowly, "perhaps entertained is hardly the word I should have employed to describe the tarantella of sensations I have experienced during the time you mention. Electrified, I think, is the particular expression I should use, as the only thing even mildly suitable to the occasion."

Once again Ayres stifled a well-nigh irresistible inclination to laugh aloud.

"Man, man," exclaimed the Vicar, sternly, "who has had the bringing up of this boy, with the face of a genius, with the thoughts of a genius, who talked to me upon subjects I should have deemed impossible, with a glibness that made me reel? At whose door does such devilish upbringing lie? It is so strange, so horribly wonderful, I cannot shake off the remembrance of it even now; it is so strange, I shall never shake off the impression of it."

"Strange!" interrupted Ayres, "wouldn't you be strange if you had been crammed to death by three blasted and damned tutors? Oh, I beg your pardon, Grant, three tutors I mean, who locked up their horrible legacy of learning within this brilliant child's brain, before he had even added his own wonderful thoughts to leaven it. Wouldn't you be strange if you had been afflicted with a Yogi backed up by two

Buddhists, instilling enough esoteric Buddhism to make a Grand Lama vomit. Strange! ye gods, I wonder he remained sane, or didn't die from ptomaine poisoning, caused through condensed faiths. He has learned enough Mathematics to solve by an equation the riddle of the Sphinx. Enough Euclid to supply the missing books. Enough Greek to retranslate the Bible, which, by the way, he does, in his own curious way."

Cathcart Grant smiled, for the first time, then he sighed.

"Yes," he said, "I do not mean it irreverently, but he talked as if—as if—he had only recently left God."

"Perhaps he has," said Mr. Ayres, significantly.

Cathcart Grant looked curiously at his old college friend. It had certainly never appeared in his college life that Aping-Ayres had any, save a very superficial, interest in the Almighty. Judging, too, from many rumours he had heard concerning his life in London, Aping-Ayres could hardly have been considered the fitting companion for a child.

Unconscious of his thoughts, his friend continued—

"As if this was not sufficient, he has been made the constant associate (although all good fellows in their way) of sculptors, painters, poets, musicians, at intervals and for years in that preposterous Tower of Babel of the Arts, the once famous Argaffel house in Chelsea. He is as conversant as any European connoisseur with all the more subtle transitions of art in painting, from Leonardo da Vinci and Paul Veronese to Whistler; with half the sculptors from Michael Angelo to Rodin, with most of the music from Pergolesi and Bach to Brahms, to say nothing of a heterogeneous mass of literature taking only the last third from Omar Khayyám to Pierre Loti. All this I couldn't help before, but I have stopped it now. Added to this, he has most miraculously remained a child."

"Except for his extraordinary powers of conversation."

"Exactly; except, as you say, for his extraordinary powers of conversation. An artist he will always be, every strange thought of his life is an expression of art. And, added to all that, he is a little aristocrat to his finger tips, and has only just escaped being the heir of the late Earl of Wellminster, whose grandson he is.

Cathcart Grant stiffened a little at the mention of the name.

"The only time, I regret to say, that my calling was ever insulted was by the nobleman you name, during the period I was a junior curate at Wellminster. The occasion was a quite courteous appeal for a subscription for an orphan. I had at least the satisfaction of administering a rebuke, which, however, deprived me of my curacy."

"An orphan could hardly ever have appealed to the Earl of Wellminster, since he left this one to starve."

"To starve?"

"I am the only person at the present moment in the world to look after him."

Whereupon Mr. Ayres recounted such information as he deemed expedient of the outlines of Tinwhumpinny's history.

Bit by bit Cathcart Grant opened his eyes, whilst he suddenly felt as if he had never properly understood or appreciated Aping-Ayres, although that gentleman scarcely mentioned himself at all during the recital.

Impulsively he held out his hand, and grasped that of Aping-Ayres. "Bravo, old man, you will never regret it."

"Regret it," said Aping Ayres, with an odd laugh, "why, man alive, it is the one thing in my life I give thanks for every day, and," added Mr. Ayres, truthfully, "I never remember having given thanks for any special thing before."

"Is there anything I can do?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Well, you are an old blue, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Cathcart Grant, "but what has that to do with it?"

"Do you ever do any cross-country running now?"

"Sometimes, yet oddly enough, it always scandalizes my small parish."

"Take Tinwhumpinny out running with you in the early mornings, it's the very thing he wants."

"Why, does he get up so early?"

"Always," groaned Ayres, "five o'clock usually."

The old blue smiled. "Right you are. Has he any running things?"

"No, I can soon get him those. I'll cycle over to Bromley

and get them in the town, they keep all sorts of sizes ready made there, I know."

"Tell me one thing," asked Cathcart Grant, as he rose to depart. "Has the reverend gentleman who is temporary Vicar of *this* parish come across Tinwhumpinny?"

"Yes," said Aping-Ayres, "the encounter was very brief."

"I would have given anything to have been present," observed Cathcart Grant, and there was a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"You see," explained Aping-Ayres, "he suffered from the delusion that Tinwhumpinny was *ignorant* and a heathen, and presented him with a Bible."

"What did he do?"

"Thanked him, accepted it, and remarked that he had read it."

The two men looked at one another, and laughed.

"He led off with something even funnier than that when I first met him this afternoon."

"I can quite believe it."

"You see, as he was singing gaily, and it sounded really good, quite different to anything we get about here, I asked him if he felt inclined to augment the choir for a bit, for, you know, we are rather shaky in that direction, as I confided to him."

Aping-Ayres nodded. "And what did he say?"

"Declared that the proper place for him would be the pulpit in order to preach the proper and scientific use of the diaphragm, since the whole of singing depended upon it. Went on to declare that we were each equipped with a perfect pair of bellows inside us which very few people ever took the trouble to use at all, and wound up by an exposition of breathing, which led me to suppose at first that he was a fairly advanced Buddhist."

"How like him," said Aping-Ayres. "Come and look us up as often as you can, and don't forget the cross-country sprints."

"Not I, we will make a point of going as often as possible."

Thus it came to pass that the ling cutters of the big common, and such as chopped and stacked wood in the early

morning, together with various early workers upon hedges, ditches, and fields would, morning after morning, see two figures, one long, and possessing a great stride, the other small, but not less sturdy, sprinting across the fresh country as if their very lives depended upon their efforts.

"They can't be 'aving no paper chase," one of them paused in his work to remark one morning, "because there ain't no paper."

"They calls it training," remarked a country worthy whose labours consisted of leisurely weeding a ditch, at long intervals, when he felt sufficiently strong to continue his spasmodic efforts.

"Rum sort o' training for a kid, though," he added, "and seems funny for a parson to be dressed up in that there rig, like one of they Kent 'arriers. Uncommon odd I calls it, but 'e ain't like the other parsons round about."

"No," vouchsafed his companion in toil, who was a ling cutter, "I ain't so sure our young parson ain't better than they others."

"'Ow better?" inquired the gentleman in the ditch.

"Well, 'e don't keep yer so stand-off like, 'e talks to yer as if yer was one of 'isselves. Now 'e saw me a coming out of the Dragon t'other day, and I says to 'e, I ses, 'morning, sir,' I ses, 'mighty 'ot, ain't it?' 'Rather, ses 'e,' quite affable to me back agin. 'Can't do wivout my beer,' ses I, cos I was a wiping my mouth as I met 'im, not a challenging 'im at all, yer understand, but just sociable like, 'no,' I ses, 'I can't do without my beer o' morning, nor even evenings,' ses I, 'for that matter.' 'Why should you?' ses 'e, a laughing, as he do, all pleasant like. 'Some parsons,' ses I, a meaning o' course tne other one, 'are all agin it, and they puts The Dragon, where I 'ave spent many a social hevening, along o' fire and brimstone and sich like.'

"Well, 'e just gives one of 'is laughs, and ses 'e to me, 'e ses, do the young Vicar, 'Why,' ses 'e, 'they were always the two things which accompanied every well-conducted Dragon even in the fairy-tales, were they not? I suppose,' 'e goes on, 'even St. George visited the dragon occasionally before he overcame him, and there is a great deal of difference between

visiting a dragon and being his helpless and complete prisoner.' There now, what do you make o' that?"

"I don't make nothink of it at all," answered the gentleman in the ditch, shortly, "and I'll be domed if I know what 'e was a driving at."

"I does," equably retorted the cutter of ling, "'e was a 'inting quietly 't the sort o' condition old Tilly Slowe gets in, 'oo spends 'is days and nights there, an' 'is always mopped to the world, and 'is languidge ain't fit fer a Christian to listen to, you ask 'is wife."

"Not me," hastily interposed the mender of ditches, "'e's stood me many a drink, and never so many as when 'e's muddled, I ain't going to ask no questions at all, I don't like 'is wife, and 'is wife don't like me."

"Why?" inquired the ling cutter.

"'Cos she thinks I 'elp 'im drink."

"Well, but don't yer?"

"Of course," said the mender of ditches, once more pausing in his labours, and this time out of pure astonishment, "of course I does, an' I 'ope to 'ave the 'ealth and strength to do it fer many a day. I likes a good drink."

"I've noticed it" replied the ling cutter, "'cos I've often a seen you a mopped alongside of 'im."

CHAPTER XXV

THE FIRST FAINT SOUND OF THE MUFFLED DRUM— SOMETHING CONCERNING A PRAYER.

"TINWHUMPINNY," said Mr. Ayres, "you have lain for an entire hour full length in the bracken without uttering a word, which, I believe, constitutes a record; the ground is becoming unpleasantly dewy, and I do not intend to let you catch cold."

Tinwhumpinny turned lazily, and supported his head between his hands.

"Why, Robbie, I used to sleep out in the open whole nights."

"I would never have permitted you to do anything so preposterous," grunted Ayres.

"No, but then you would not have locked me up in a stuffy little room night after night, which seemed to stifle me, when all the hedges outside were covered in wild roses, and all the sand-dunes smelled of the sea."

It was the only time that Tinwhumpinny had ever referred in any way to his life at the bungalow, upon this one subject he had always kept a complete silence, and Ayres had duly noted the fact, and so had never encouraged his little charge to talk about that period of his life.

With the intention of changing the subject, Ayres continued: "You have not yet told me what you have been thinking about all this time."

"Something curious, that happened early this morning before breakfast."

"What sort of thing, Tinwhumps?"

"A gipsy woman told me something rather strange."

"What sort of thing, and where did you see her?"

"In the coppice, at the end of the road. You know I went

to fetch a jar of marmalade at the shop, because we had run out of the home-made jam."

Mr. Ayres nodded, before adding: "Owing to your deprecations upon it."

"Assisted by you," interposed Tinwhumpinny.

"A just rebuke; well, continue, Tinwhumps, what had the gipsy woman to say to you?"

"She told me my fortune."

"How?"

"Well, she examined both my hands."

"Which, I suppose, were awfully grubby."

"Perhaps a little; she also invoked the aid of a pack of cards."

"Humph! and a precious lot of nonsense I expect she told you."

"I wonder," said Tinwhumpinny, thoughtfully. "She said it would only be a little life."

"Tinwhumps!" and Mr. Ayres started suddenly up from the grass as if he had been shot, "what are you saying?"

"Only what she told me."

"It would only be a little life, quite short, but two dark people, she couldn't quite tell who they were, but she thought they would be men, would always be one upon either side of me. One I should always love, and the other I should always loathe. But she warned me against the one who was the worst, whom, she said, would, in the end, take all the best things in life away from me, and would take at the same time all the best things away from the other one too."

"Tinwhumps, I never heard such a lot of preposterous rot in my life. Had she the impudence to charge anything for this precious exhibition of charlatanism?"

"No, she told me for nothing, but I gave her fourpence, it was all I had. She told me one other thing."

"I don't want to hear it," said Ayres.

"Why, I may just as well tell you. She said there was some place—like a hillside covered in with flowers, she said it was—but she didn't think it was British."

"No, I shouldn't think she was British either," grunted Ayres.

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"Well, she told me that's where the end would be."

"The end of what?" demanded Ayres, almost savagely. Tinwhumpinny rose and stretched himself.

"The end of the life that was going to be so short."

Ayres felt as if some one had suddenly poured icy water over him, and to counteract this unpleasant effect he repeatedly stamped upon the ground with much energy; finally he burst out—

"If I have the good fortune to meet the lady, I will give her in charge."

"Why, she hasn't done any harm."

"Hasn't done any harm," shouted the indignant Mr. Ayres, "the beastly creature has almost spoiled my appetite, she's positively given me the horrors, and I absolutely feel I need the cheerfulness of the lighted lamp, and the welcome of what we hope will be a well-spread supper-table, before I shall be anything like myself again."

"Oh yes, Robbie, and strawberries," suggested Tinwhumpinny, as they turned homewards.

"You never seem to get tired of strawberries."

"Never," agreed Tinwhumpinny, "the jolliest fruit of the whole wild earth, except——"

"Except what?"

"Blackberries."

"I can't say blackberries ever appealed to me particularly," observed Mr. Ayres.

"Because you never picked them straight off the hedges as I have done. Anyway, they are better than tinned pine-apples."

"Don't be unkind, Tinwumps, about 107, Church Street."

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "I didn't mean to be, but, oh, Robbie, we did have more than our share of tinned stuffs there, didn't we?"

"But didn't we always have the best?" demanded Mr. Ayres.

"Not always," said Tinwhumpinny, "I have recollections of——"

"Hush," said Mr. Ayres, "the rest is silence."

"Anyway, Robbie," said Tinwhumpinny, "after supper

you are going to make up a wonderful story, for my especial benefit."

"I hope to be equal to the demand," said Ayres, "I certainly remember a strange history of two scribbling men I knew in Fleet Street, and it should appeal to you."

"Why?"

"Well, it really resembles, in a modern fashion, the parable of the people who toiled in the vineyard all day long for a penny. The conclusion, at any rate, of the story, I am convinced is quite as unjust as the incident related in the parable."

"Perhaps it was really awfully just," remarked Tinwhumpinny, meditatively.

"How do you mean?" faltered Ayres, believing himself yet again upon the point of being startled in spite of himself.

"Because," said Tinwhumpinny, "don't you think perhaps that the last ten minutes the last one had there was probably worse than the whole of the rest of the eleven hours lumped together."

Mr. Ayres coughed. "What makes you think that, Tinwhumps?" he inquired, somewhat weakly.

"I don't know," confessed Tinwhumpinny, "if it did mean that, I can understand it, if it didn't mean that, it seems simply stupid."

Whilst Tinwhumpinny disappeared to wash the worst of dirt from his hands, the landlady put the last two dishes upon a most attractive supper-table, and lifted the two heaped masses of wild flowers Tinwhumpinny had brought in each hand, and commenced to place them in water.

"Where he is, sir, it is always wild flowers, he brings wild flowers everywhere he goes."

"Yes," agreed Mr. Ayres.

"And," added the woman, "he brings something else as well, something—something—what shall I call it——"

"Poetry," suggested Mr. Ayres, quietly.

"Lor, sir, yes, that is what I wanted to say, but how strange that you should have thought of it, sir."

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" agreed Ayres, ambiguously.

"Have you seen a gipsy woman anywhere about here?" demanded Ayres.

"Yes, sir, I did see one this morning."

"Well, if you see her again you can tell her from me that if I catch her talking nonsense either to children or grown-up people either, for that matter, I will give her in charge."

"Why, what has she been saying, sir?"

"Goodness only knows," growled Mr. Ayres, "I don't believe she knows herself. If she isn't mad already I feel convinced she will become so soon, and if she isn't already locked up, all I can say is she ought to be without any unnecessary delay upon the part of the authorities."

Later on the young Vicar, Cathcart Grant, saw them up in the lighted sitting-room as he passed, and making his way upstairs, joined them, to smoke a pipe, as he often did of an evening.

"Coming out for a run to-morrow, old chap?" asked the Vicar of Tinwhumpinny.

"Rather," said Tinwhumps.

"What time?"

"I shall be up at six."

"Five," corrected Mr. Ayres, "I have an awful presentiment it will be five, or even earlier."

The young Vicar smiled.

Tinwhumpinny was leaning out of the window, listening to an evening hymn the villagers were singing inside the little iron-roofed chapel. It was so close to the cottage, every word of the hymn could be heard.

At the end of it, Tinwhumpinny spoke from the open window—

"It is a pity that only a few of the hymns in the Ancient and Modern are so beautiful, and so many are so very ugly."

"So," said the Vicar, "you think some are beautiful?"

"Very."

"For instance?"

"‘At even ere the sun was set,’ which they have just sung."

"Yes."

"‘Abide with me’; but the greatest of all, ‘Lead, kindly Light.’"

"And about the ugly ones."

"Some of them don't even scan," said Tinwhumpinny.

Ayres and the Vicar exchanged glances.

"Now," continued Tinwhumpinny, "I have written a hymn, but it isn't like the other hymns."

"No, I bet it isn't," vouchsafed Mr. Ayres, sotto voce.

Tinwhumpinny unfolded a somewhat crumpled piece of exercise-book paper, and placed it upon the table in quite a simple manner, between Ayres and the Vicar. If anything, Tinwhumpinny had favoured the side where Mr. Ayres sat, for he evidently considered that in all things Ayres should have a preference, even to the reading of so simple a thing as a hymn, which he, Tinwhumpinny, had composed.

Ayres slowly unfolded the document, which was quite short, then he handed it to the Vicar, with the following significant remark, "It couldn't be sung in Church, it would cause a revolution. But it is all poetry, in spite of that."

"But isn't a revolution what the Church is in most need of," asked Tinwhumpinny, innocently. "Was not the coming of Christ a revolution, and will not the next coming be bigger, and isn't it the only thing to stop utter dullness and indifference, and—and even worse?"

Cathcart Grant was regarding Tinwhumpinny with a face that had grown strangely earnest, but he never said a word, the strange child had begun again, and Cathcart Grant wanted to hear all he had to say.

"Which," asked Tinwhumpinny, gently, "did most for the Church? The sword and trumpet, and all the amazing bloodshed, or the word of love?"

"The word of love," said the young Vicar, "but oh, my child, you little know how difficult it is to make people listen to it, in whatsoever form it may be presented to them."

Tinwhumpinny nodded across to the Vicar—

"Yes, there have always been such a lot of people who are deaf," he said.

"And many more who are blind," interposed Mr. Ayres.

"And most of all," concluded the Vicar, "who are likewise dumb."

"Wouldn't a congregation such as that be an affliction?" laughed Tinwhumpinny, gaily; "it only leaves one the power to grimace."

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Cathcart Grant walked home that night very thoughtful. Perhaps because a new line of thought had been suggested to his mind for the first time.

Was some sort of revolution really necessary, could anything be more hopeless than utter indifference—and—and worse?

Among the questions which the young Vicar asked himself before he went to bed, two seemed to stand out by reason of their own insistent predominance.

Would some startling trumpet call have also the power to carry with it the note of love? Would he, Cathcart Grant, ever have alike the courage, the wit, the personality, and the strength to sound that trumpet note?

He had been buried in his little country parish for years, sinking slowly into apathy, becoming covered in indifference, as surely as the rubble wall around his church was becoming covered in lichen.

A curious sense of dissatisfaction was slowly stealing over him, a vision of something far, far higher and better was taking gradual possession of his soul.

Before that night closed, one voice at least was lifted up to the great white throne, while the name of Tinwhumpinny was mentioned

CHAPTER XXVI

"CONSIDER THE LILIES OF THE FIELD"

THERE was a probability that it must have been at least ten or twelve years since Aping-Ayres had entered a church, and possibly then only such chapels at Oxford as he had perforce to attend.

In the country, Ayres felt that he ought to accompany Tinwhumpinny to church, firstly, because Tinwhumpinny was accustomed to going, and, secondly, because it appeared to be a delicate way of returning Cathcart G. ant's calls.

The church of which the Reverend Cathcart Grant was incumbent was a pretty little village church, possessing at least two stained glass windows, an old oak reredos, an oak pulpit, a quite good organ, and a very indifferent choir.

The living was in the gift of the Earl of Derry.

They sauntered through the fields, across to the church, upon this particular summer Sunday evening, and were shown to a little pew only a few rows back from the pulpit.

It did not take Tinwhumpinny long to discover that Cathcart Grant had at least studied him in one respect. The three hymns for the evening were the very ones he had named as his choice a few nights before, and, moreover, in the order wherein he had named them.

There was one thing, however, of which Tinwhumpinny was unconscious. He never knew the hours and hours of thought the young Vicar had lain upon himself in order to appeal to a strange child, in order to satisfy a criticism beyond anything the young Vicar had ever encountered in his country church. It was never given to Tinwhumpinny to know how

he had been the means and the inspiration of making Cathcart Grant desire to preach his first great sermon. In after years, when one man had become a noted dean, world-famed for his golden sermons, so that people thronged to hear him, standing to the very doors, let it be here stated, in justice to him, that he always acknowledged that a child first led him.

When the other man, sitting now beside that child, had become a writer of European reputation, he always, too, acknowledged all his life, his indebtedness to the one of all others he had loved most in the world.

Unconscious at that time of this fact, one man, from his pew was looking almost carelessly towards the altar; when men were beginning to look in the direction of the cross.

The Earl of Derry leaned back in his square oak family pew beneath a suspended particle of carving suggesting a lop-sided crown, and, for the first time during the service, obtained a view of Tinwhumpinny.

Something in the face evidently struck his lordship, who kept on muttering to himself, "Good gracious me, now where have I seen that boy's face, which is really remarkable?" And the fact that he knew something or somebody almost exactly like it continued to puzzle his lordship, until he began to realize, by way of a change of thought, that the young Vicar was commencing to preach so remarkable a sermon that the Earl of Derry, who owned several other livings, quietly considered the advancement of Cathcart Grant, as he always declared afterwards, from the preaching of his sermon upon that particular evening.

"Consider the lilies of the field." It was a simple text; some of the congregation even reposed themselves for a surreptitious nap. Nothing Cathcart Grant had done up to that Sunday evening had ever appeared in any way out of the ordinary to them. But Cathcart Grant had become electrified; perhaps, in the dimly lighted church, one might have said transfigured.

Originally he had put out perhaps the best sermon of his life, intending to read it. Without any preconceived

notion why he did such a thing, he suddenly closed the neatly written manuscript.

He saw Tinwhumpinny's face in a sort of a haze, and then, undoubtedly for a moment, he saw something else; perhaps a vision of his own future power.

Yes, Cathcart Grant was sounding the first trumpet note, sounding it to such purpose that the congregation sat up and stared.

A quarter of an hour went past, then half an hour, even three-quarters, and people had scarcely even fidgeted.

Aping-Ayres blinked his eyes: could this man, who was standing there, pouring out eloquence which any child could have understood, be the man he had known at Oxford?

"My goodness," thought Aping-Ayres, "his imagery is superb; his ideas upon the reconstruction of Christ's life and thoughts, and his love of wild flowers is immense. Hullo! he's ending up, and it's a jolly fine end too, about those wild flowers. I wonder what Tinwhumps thinks of it," and, for the first time, he turned to look at him.

Tinwhumpinny had two bright tears in his eyes, that did not roll down his cheeks.

The Earl of Derry noticed those two tears. "By Jove!" he thought, "that child has got the face of a little artist, a poet. Good gracious me! yes, I've got it; why it's a picture in my own gallery at home; what on earth could I have been thinking of? Why, they are as alike as two beans."

Cathcart Grant turned to the east. The sermon was finished.

"By Jove!" muttered the Earl, "that is the finest sermon I have ever heard in the whole course of my life; the only one that has ever stirred me, or that I did not go fast to sleep over. That fellow can preach."

Across the fields, afterwards, the Earl of Derry caught up Cathcart Grant, and walked with him.

He shook his hand warmly. "I am reproaching myself because I have not been to hear you before," commenced the Earl. "I wish Lady Derry had been with me. Your sermon was magnificent: it was a revelation to me. I had no idea you could preach like that."

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The Reverend Cathcart Grant hesitated for a moment, but he was exceedingly truthful by nature.

"Nor could I have, Lord Derry, even a fortnight ago."

"May one enquire the cause of so startling a change, then?"

"Yes; a sudden illumination."

"Man or woman?"

"Neither; a child."

"Did he happen to be in church to-night?"

"Yes," smiled Cathcart Grant.

"He must be rather remarkable, if he possesses the powers you attribute to him."

"Remarkable!" said Cathcart Grant: "he is a revelation. I have never encountered anything like him."

"Come back to supper," said the Earl, "and tell me all about him, and about the man who was with him, who appeared to have quite an interesting face."

Some time after supper at Trenham Court that night, Lord Derry led the way to the picture gallery.

He walked, first of all, towards a picture, smaller than many another which surrounded it, and switched up the electric light.

The face which looked out at them from the frame seemed to be the very face of Tinwhumpinny; yet it was the well-known face of one whose name was afterwards a household word.

"What a very strange coincidence!" said Cathcart Grant.

"Humph!" exclaimed the Earl; "it must be more than a coincidence."

"Only that really," said Cathcart Grant, quickly. "I know his history; the families never even met, never touched at any point. I know this because I was once curate at Westminster, and the family tree and its ramifications was sufficiently often impressed upon me."

"Seeing is believing," said the Earl. "I don't attempt an explanation; I only say that he is closely related somehow by descent, otherwise those two faces could not exist."

And Cathcart Grant pondered over these words very often.

Before Cathcart Grant left Trenham Court that Sunday evening, the Earl of Derry had invited the young Vicar to bring both Apinç-Ayres and Tinwhumpinny to call upon himself and his wife, and Cathcart Grant promised to bring them both one day before long.

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CHAPTER XXVII

POETA NASCITUR, NON FIT

UPON the evening which had been arranged for their visit to Trenham Court, Cathcart Grant had been unexpectedly called away to London, consequently Aping-Ayres and Tinwhumpinny made their way to the Court by themselves.

The Earl of Derry was not only a very great nobleman, but, what may be considered as being more important, an exceedingly cultured gentleman.

The Countess of Derry, considering her forty-five years of age, was perhaps one of the most beautiful women in England.

Crowning a face, which had retained all the beautiful colourings of youth, was a head of hair, quite white and lustrous, as only beautiful hair can be which has made a natural transition from darkest brown to grey, and then to whiteness.

Aping-Ayres had never spoken a truer word when he declared that Tinwhumpinny was a little aristocrat to his finger-tips. Never had this fact been more startlingly in evidence than during his visit at Trenham Court.

Tinwhumpinny was at home, so to speak; he was in his natural and proper setting, and everybody realized this fact.

When the Countess of Derry had first greeted Tinwhumpinny, despite her great love of all children she had hesitated for a second what form of greeting to bestow.

Tinwhumpinny never hesitated; he put his arms round her neck, and hugged her.

The Countess, whose one wistful regret had ever been that she had no children of her own, would have exchanged the

priceless string of pearls she wore—many times over—for those arms clasped round her neck.

Perhaps the same thought passed through the mind of the Earl of Derry, as he watched them.

During the whole of dinner Tinwhumpinny, although obviously enjoying himself immensely, was very quiet, despite the fact that he was drinking in all the exceedingly beautiful things everywhere in evidence in this country palace.

The Earl of Derry, after a conversation with Cathcart Grant, had made up his mind, not without amusement, to be surprised at nothing that happened; but as Tinwhumpinny remained almost silent, he concluded that any special exhibition of his powers was, at any rate for that evening, not to be vouchsafed to them.

Before the evening was over, the Earl realized that this surmise was totally incorrect, however.

The first enlightenment came some time after dinner, as they all sauntered through the beautiful Italian terraces, turned to the colour of rose madder in the sunset; eventually coming upon one of the most perfect clearings in the lovely grounds.

"Dame Nature wants a lot of beating," observed the Earl, as he looked complacently at the fair picture around him.

"Yes," said Tinwhumpinny, confidentially, "I always feel she is my real mother, you know; but isn't it a pity, in spite of all the love bestowed upon her, she is so harsh and cold?"

The Earl coughed, "Er—cold?" he inquired.

"Yes, all laws; and for the least one of them disregarded all sorts of terrible retributions and penalties for every one of those innumerable things, it is almost impossible to remember all at once. Yet I suppose she really loves us when she gathers us all again unto herself, and holds some part of us clasped to her for ever."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the astonished Earl, "how do you mean?"

"Don't you remember, in Omar Khayyám, 'the guests, star-scattered on the grass?' Niobe clasped her dead children to herself, and longed for them to live again. Perhaps our Mother the Earth does exactly the same, and we shall live again, of course."

"Live again," ventured the Earl, not without a suspicion that he was rapidly getting right out of his depth.

"Yes. How many times do you suppose you have been on the earth before you arrived at your present pitch?"

The Earl positively gasped. "Good gracious! I haven't the remotest notion, only—only this once, I had always supposed."

"Oh no," replied Tinwhumpinny, "it must have been many times, only memory, most mercifully, doesn't accompany each transition to enable one to keep a record of it."

The Earl twisted his grizzled moustache somewhat helplessly. For once in his life he seemed to be at a loss for words wherewith to express himself.

Tinwhumpinny picked up an acorn, which had fallen in its green state before its time, and turned it over in his hand as he continued, "This acorn would not remember, if it ever sprung up again, anything of that great stately oak from which it came. It could never remember how it had once been a part of it. But most likely it will become, in the long years away from now, just such another oak, opposite to its own old life, without the very least recollection of it; that would be perhaps, even then, its third or fourth time here."

"But—but," ventured the Earl, "man is an utterly different creation."

"Nature only made one set of laws, such an awful lot of them too, but they applied to everything, once and for all, and I suppose they must have been pretty comprehensive even to have done that. What do you think about it?"

"Think," muttered the Earl, "I am trying to think now."

"Of course," said Tinwhumpinny, trustfully, "I knew at once that you were not one of those people who carry lumber about with you, neither is Mr. Cathcart Grant."

"Er—what sort of lumber?" asked the Earl.

"Why, sets of thoughts which lots of people get into their heads, and never get rid of all their lives, but go on adding and adding to the lumber, until it is so stuffed up that they can only bale out one bit of old thought at a time, which they believe fits some particular occasion. Very often it doesn't fit at all, and they know it, and it makes them very self-conscious,

and very irritable, without their having a glimmer of a notion why they have become so. To carry about lumber like that must be an awful nuisance to themselves, and it is very trying to other people."

"God bless my soul!" said the Earl.

Aping-Ayres, who had sauntered up in time to hear the last observation, and believing, from past experience, that his lordship might be in possible difficulties, tactfully came to the rescue.

But however perplexed his lordship might be, there could be no doubt whatever that he was becoming more and more interested in Tinwhumpinny, and would not leave him for a moment.

Ayres would have been left almost out in the cold if the Countess had not entertained him so charmingly.

"What a wonderful and lovable boy that is," said the Countess, when the Earl and Tinwhumpinny had gone on ahead, "and, do you know, Mr. Ayres, I am really rather thankful than otherwise, after what Mr. Grant told us, that we haven't all been strung up like electric batteries."

Aping-Ayres laughed. "Wait until you hear what the Earl has to say. I rather fancy he has come in for it all up to the present."

"Can he really think and talk so wonderfully?"

"Yes, he can talk as well, and think as quickly, as any of the cleverest men I have ever met."

"Then he is a genius."

"Yes, I am afraid so."

"Why afraid?"

"Did you ever know one, Lady Derry, whose path was not a path of thorns? Can you mention one of these greatest of life's gifted ones who, if they lived long enough, did so without the penalty of finding themselves alone—quite alone, because nobody could quite understand them?"

"So you think," asked the Countess, "that some advance so far in the tortuous pathway of art that they eventually find themselves utterly alone?"

"I know it."

"That is rather a sad thought, is it not, Mr. Ayres?"

"Very."

After all the other show-places had been visited, the Earl escorted Tinwhumpinny to the picture-gallery. He was curious to see, since his discovery, what effect a certain picture would produce upon Tinwhumpinny.

Up to that point it might be truthfully said that all the effects had been produced solely by Tinwhumpinny, and in a sufficient quantity to last his lordship for some considerable time.

Trenham Court possessed its own installation of electricity, and all the pictures, most of them by famous masters, were lighted by electric lights, shaded over, so as to fling the light full upon any or all of the pictures hanging in the long gallery.

Whilst Mr. Ayres and the Countess lingered before a Raeburn at one end of the gallery, the Earl took Tinwhumpinny towards one of the smallest of the pictures, hanging by itself, and switched on the electric light.

Tinwhumpinny suddenly stretched out his hands in delighted and childish astonishment.

"Why," he said, "Why—it's—it's me."

The Earl looked from the picture, which a great English master had painted, to the child beside him, then again, from the child to the picture.

Despite the older fashioned clothes of the picture, which hardly seemed so very different from the clothes Tinwhumpinny was wearing, line for line, feature for feature, was identical. The same modelling of the head, the same almost spiritual eyes, the same modelling of the small lumps of intelligence over the eyebrows, which phrenologists tell us means brain and all sorts of other rare gifts.

The very hands were identical.

"Of course," said Tinwhumpinny, "it isn't me, but it might really be me, don't you think?"

"Strangely like," answered the Earl.

"Who was he?" asked Tinwhumpinny.

"One of the greatest poets who has ever lived, painted when he was about your age." Then the Earl switched the light off the picture

"Anyway," said Tinwhumpinny, "I am, at any rate, like a poet."

"Yes, my little friend," replied the Earl, "in more ways than one I should say."

The really great treasures in the gallery were many and varied, including foreign as well as English masters.

Slowly a doubt began to dawn upon the Earl of Derry whether he knew as much about his own pictures as Tinwhumpinny did, but he doubtless excused this failing upon the ground that they had all been bequeathed by his ancestors without a sufficiently lucid set of explanations left behind to explain their particular significance.

Finally, the little party of four met at the end of the gallery, and only one picture remained.

"It is one of the first five of Leonardo da Vinci's finest small works," explained the Earl, as he flooded the picture with light. "As you see, the subject is scriptural and allegorical. The little Christ and St. John, with the Apostolic lamb between them, and isn't it really very beautiful?" asked the Earl; "but I must say I have always preferred the face of the little St. John," and the Earl pointed to the darker-haired of the two children so exquisitely painted.

Suddenly Tinwhumpinny said, "Lord Derry, but that is the picture of Christ."

"No, no," said his lordship, "I have got you there, Master Tinwhumpinny, the other is the child Christ, with the halo round his head."

Tinwhumpinny remained silent; he was too well bred to contradict a man holding some especial belief, and moreover, in his own house.

But the Countess had no intention of allowing Tinwhumpinny to be silenced. She laid a hand upon his shoulder, as lightly and as lovingly as his own mother might have done, had he ever possessed a mother who had cared for such things.

"Why do you think, dear boy, the other one is not the Christ child?"

Tinwhumpinny looked at her.

"Which came first?" he asked.

"Why, St. John."

"Who is first in the foreground in the picture, being pushed forward, introduced, by the other?"

"Why, I believe the Christ child," answered her ladyship.

"No, that is St. John, he came first, the other child is introducing him, begging others to listen to him first, the aura around his head is the aura of a saint, and of a saint only. The other figure, the one Lord Derry likes best, is Christ; see above his head is the symbol of a Greek Church, the symbol standing for a king."

The elder three exchanged glances.

"By Jove," said the Earl, generously, "I believe he is right, and I am wrong. I never did understand what that sign was, any more than I understood why Leonardo should have painted three full-sized iris, or flags as we commonly call them in the country, right across the background of the picture. Can you tell me what that means?"

Tinwhumpinny remained silent for a minute, he seemed to hesitate to speak, but it was neither from nervousness, from which he had never suffered, any more than it was self-consciousness, which he had never been known to possess in the slightest degree. Perhaps it was the gentle hesitation of some deeper feeling.

"If you know, Tinwhumps," said Aping-Ayres, "tell us."

Tinwhumpinny looked gravely from one face to the other.

"Do you not know what it means?" he asked.

He could read in their faces that they did not know, and as for Aping-Ayres, it must be confessed, that gentleman had never noticed the three flowers across the background at all.

"It is emblematical of the Crucifixion," said Tinwhumpinny.

The Earl of Derry whistled softly.

"The great painter did what Mr. Grant did the other night," said Tinwhumpinny, "he used symbols, because we can't stand the truth, everything has to be clothed, even our bodies, for the same reason."

"Yes," hastily interposed the Countess, "yes, and to carry

the idea a step further still, what a masterly touch to have chosen a flower for the symbol, which is known to be everlasting, inasmuch as it springs up again and again and never dies, at least so the country people say."

"They were the lilies of the field," said Tinwhumpinny, "the wild flowers He loved the best."

That night, when the Countess of Derry was brushing out her beautiful hair, she asked her husband, not without a tone of amusement in her voice—

"Well, what do you think of them?"

"Good gracious, my dear," answered the Earl, "I have done nothing but think ever since they both entered the place, and I've done nothing but think, ever since they left it, I have positively never done so much rapid thinking in a limited space of time before. I feel," confessed the Earl, "as if I had been taken upon a species of spiritual steeplechase, consisting solely of pre-arranged falls, not intended to be negotiated by mortals at all."

The Countess laughed delightedly. "I don't think you stumbled or fell once," she said.

"And," burst forth the Earl, "I don't believe, and I won't believe, and never shall believe that that boy is the grandchild of that mean, contemptible, dunder-headed ass, the Earl of Wellminster."

"De mortuis," commenced the Countess, softly.

"I know, my dear, I know, but I tell you I knew some of the family, there wasn't the slightest evidence of a brain among the whole blooming lot. And, Millicent!"

"Yes, dear."

The Countess of Derry turned, with one of her infinitely graceful gestures, and leaned her head affectionately against her husband's arm, whilst he stood beside the high-backed chair, in which she was sitting before her dressing-table.

"You know the picture of the boy poet, downstairs in the gallery?"

"Yes, dear, of course."

"Do you mean to tell me, Millicent, that there isn't some relationship there of some sort?"

"Well, dear, perhaps there is."

"There isn't," said the Earl, shortly, apparently contradicting himself with as much ease as a well-known character in "Alice in Wonderland." "I have enquired."

"Really, my dear, I don't quite understand you, although, of course, I see the extraordinary likeness, you say there is a relationship, and then you immediately say there isn't."

"Well, I mean to say there is, of course there must be, but it must be one that can never be talked about."

"My dear, do you think that remark is quite in good taste?"

"Oh, sorry, Millicent," said the Earl, "but really I have never experienced such a lot of bewildering phenomena before in my life. What with that extraordinary boy, and his extraordinary likeness to that picture."

"And," interposed her ladyship, "his still more extraordinary conversation."

"God bless my soul," said the Earl, "did you ever hear anything like it in your life? Oh no, though, I forgot, of course you didn't, you were away most of the time and couldn't hear."

"I caught bits," laughed her ladyship, "and, anyway, I should think Mr. Aping-Ayres tolerable good second, for, I assure you, I had to use all my wits when he was disposed to converse."

"Yes," said his lordship, "I should think those two must have enough brains between them to the drachm to go round amongst a good couple of dozen ordinary people."

"Even divided up, as you suggest, I cannot imagine any of the twenty-four *ordinary* people knowing what to do with such a distribution, after having acquired it. Yet, with it all," continued her ladyship, "he is a simple little gentleman, not a bit of a prig."

"Good gracious, no!"

"Did you see the way he put his arms round my neck?"

"Yes, my dear, showed his good sense, I liked him for that."

His wife laughed. "It shows he has never been loved," she said.

"Nonsense," rejoined the Earl, "How about Aping-Ayres,

why he worships the ground he walks on, and is bringing him up jolly sensibly, I consider."

"No, dear, I meant never been loved, in the sense of not having a mother."

"But he must have had a mother at some time," suggested the Earl, as if he supposed Tinwhumpinny to be so remarkable that the ordinary programme of nature might have even been disregarded.

"Yes, dear, of course he had a mother, but she never loved him."

"Now, how in the name of wonder do you know that?" demanded the Earl.

"My dear, how do we women know so many of the things we do?"

"I have never been able to ascertain," replied her husband, "and I am too old to begin to try at my time of life. I am content to allow it to remain one of the mysteries. Oh, by the way, that reminds me; do you know one of the things that boy said to-night?"

"No," said Lady Derry, "but I am prepared for a good deal."

"Well, after we had discussed Nature, or rather, he had," added the Earl, truthfully, "for I hadn't much to say, the very phrase I have just used cropped up. Something or other about one of the mysteries. Well," continued the Earl, "he declared that mysteries ought always to remain mysteries, and the most hopeless people in the world were those who were perpetually clamouring for some elucidation of them. So I told him that *he* himself was really a mystery to me, but I should not dream of asking him to explain himself."

"What did he say?"

"Said he was so grateful, because he would have considered it almost immoral."

The Countess threw her head back, and laughed outright. "Oh, how lovely!" she said.

"I tell you, Millicent, I haven't had such an evening for years, and I only hope I haven't enjoyed it at the expense of a little over-clever brain that oughtn't to be taxed like this."

"My dear," said the Countess, "you have only had a

sample, I should imagine, of what Mr. Aping-Ayres dwells amidst both day and night, but possibly great love induces great powers of endurance."

"Humph, yes," said the Earl, "I don't think I could stick too much of it; in fact, I should, in all probability, perpetually be losing my temper, because I should not always be able to find a fitting answer."

"I cannot imagine," announced Lady Derry, as she gave a final brush to her hair, "Mr. Aping-Ayres being ever at a loss to give an answer to anything or anybody, he struck me as being equipped absolutely *cap-a-pié*."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE BLACK SPECK RETURNS AND BRINGS A PESTILENCE

THE long happy summer days each winged their flight leaving behind a glitter and a memory, even as a bright troop of swallows who have hovered for a while ere they sweep swiftly on towards some longer light, some brighter day.

Despite the fact that Aping-Ayres spent at least two-thirds of each day, either reading in the hammock which Tinwhumpinny had fixed up for him under three trees beside the cottage, or wandering with Tinwhumpinny through every wood and dell within a radius of twelve miles, he nevertheless discovered, much to his astonishment, that he was doing more real good work, and writing more literary matter than he had ever done before in the whole course of his life.

Did Aping-Ayres ever realize, during those days, that he was flinging away the cynicism which he had wrapt round himself as a garment, that he was losing a self-manufactured contempt of himself and his fellow-creatures, that the very gall and wormwood of his misdirected and misapplied talents were being made beautiful, and being restored whole unto him in a crucible too delicate even to be seen?

In all probability he never realized that the better part of him was becoming again as a little child, yet the greatest poetical and spiritual authority the world has ever known once avowed that it was only possible to enter the greatest Kingdom in such a guise, illumined through such a spirit.

There could be no doubt that the hall marks, so to speak, of dissipation were gradually being sponged out from the countenance of Aping-Ayres for good and all.

True, he continued to drink in moderation, but he was never now seen to be intoxicated.

Could his old friend Reginaldo have seen him at this period, he would, most probably, in his own particular tones of impertinent curiosity, have inquired of Mr. Ayres, whether or no that gentleman had not taken a new lease of life since he appeared at least ten years younger.

It must be admitted that it would have been quite a shock to Mr. Reginaldo had he suddenly discovered that his friend Mr. Ayres had ceased to be bored with the world, not to mention himself and everything else in it.

Wild roses still clustered in stray fragrant patches above the hawthorns, although the strawberries had long ceased their little season. Summer honeysuckle came to bloom by way of adding its own particular welcome, and still Aping-Ayres lingered on in the country.

He was beginning to appreciate the value of the healthy tan colour which the sun and air were painting upon his face and upon the face of Tinwhumpinny.

"I have never felt so well in my life," Mr. Ayres confided one day to Tinwhumpinny, during an afternoon ramble in the Cudham Woods.

"I have never felt ill in my life yet," answered Tinwhumpinny.

"Wonderful," mused Mr. Ayres.

"Why, it's natural, isn't it?" enquired Tinwhumpinny.

"I hope so," admitted Mr. Ayres, "but I do hope, Tinwhumps, that you won't have a lot of things all together."

"What do you exactly mean, Robbie, by a 'lot of things all together?'" asked Tinwhumpinny, with the amused smile he usually accorded Aping-Ayres as a sort of tribute.

Mr. Ayres methodically counted upon his fingers all the cheerful complaints he believed inseparable from infant life upon this planet.

"Whooping-cough," he announced, "Measles, Scarlet Fever, Chicken Pox, Croup, Scarlatina, and—er—let me see——"

"But I couldn't possibly have them all *at once*," suggested Tinwhumpinny.

"No, but you haven't had any of them, have you? Whatever should I do if you had even one of them!"

"Nurse me through it," announced Tinwhumpinny, promptly; "but, Robbie, why do you discuss my ailments in advance? surely," asked Tinwhumpinny, as he lifted his face carefully for inspection, "I don't look as if I were sickening for anything, do I?"

"You look disgustingly healthy," announced Mr. Ayres, after surveying Tinwhumpinny through his eyeglass, in much the same manner in which he might have surveyed some curious beetle, "I can't think how you manage to do it."

"I don't manage to do it at all," said Tinwhumpinny, "it's all done for me, but I suppose," he added, "that you have had all these complaints yourself, haven't you, Robbie?"

"Yes," sighed Mr. Ayres, "I was not even spared nettle-rash, and a mild attack of diphtheria, brought on by trying to manufacture home-made ginger-beer with some bad well-water as one of the ingredients."

"Perhaps," replied Tinwhumpinny, "you have had all my share for me; anyway, we are not really a bit alike, are we, in anything, so very likely the same thing will apply here."

Mr. Ayres considered for the space of a moment. "No, Tinwhumps, I never knew of two creatures on this earth who were less like each other."

"But don't you think that is a great advantage, Robbie?"

Once again Mr. Ayres considered.

"Because, for that reason, I get sparks out of you, and you get sparks out of me."

"Sparks?" queried Mr. Ayres, vaguely.

"Yes, thoughts. If we were both alike, neither of us would have anything to compare, there would never be anything to think about, consequently never anything to say, and it would be really very dull, both wandering about in semi-darkness."

"Humph," said Mr. Ayres, "there is a distinction to be drawn between the average lighting, and living in the glare of a perpetual illumination."

"Yes," continued Mr. Ayres, feeling he had accidentally said something almost good, and not wishing to waste the

effect of it. "Yes, Tinwhumpinny, I feel at times I am actually blinking my eyes before a perpetual illumination, with the most extraordinary squibs and crackers imaginable fizzling in my ears, to say nothing of a set piece, which is always changing its prismatic colours in the most bewildering fashion."

"How funny you are, Robbie, why it sounds like a school treat, on a Thursday night, in the glass place the Argaffels took me to see."

"The Crystal Palace," queried Mr. Ayres

"Yes," agreed Tinwhumpinny, "the Argaffels spent the whole evening discussing whether it was not vulgar to be there at all, but I thought it was delightful. Now, I rather like a school treat."

"So do I," admitted Mr. Ayres, "in moderation, but it seems to me I am having my school treats, if I can use one of your own terms, all lumped into one, and the effect at times takes my breath away; I do not seem to be living in a sane world."

"We are none of us living in a quite sane world, Robbie, you have said so yourself."

"I am convinced, Tinwhumps, I talk a preposterous lot of nonsense at times, and the really alarming part of it is that I am not always conscious that I am doing it. Unfortunately, in all the talk, that all the world, and every individual in it, including myself, has ever talked, there are miles upon miles of tares and weeds, and only a few really wonderful flowers."

Tinwhumpinny made no immediate reply, he went on gathering spirals of green bracken to bind round the big tarry bouquet of wild flowers he had been picking for upwards of an hour.

"Robbie."

"Yes."

"Do you remember the other day on the weald, we agreed that the poppy was emblematical of sleep, sometimes of death?"

"Yes."

"And the blue cornflower, of life, sometimes of love?"

"Yes."

"Yet they almost always grow side by side, quite close together."

"Well?"

"The wheat and the chaff too, you couldn't have any wheat really, without a lot of chaff."

"No."

"And then, again, about the tares in the Bible, don't you think it is only that they are not really burned, only that they shrivel up, because they are not necessary to live any longer they have served their purpose."

"And then?"

"All the other remains, isn't that what it's for, isn't that what it all means, and would we understand it any better if it was put any plainer? And isn't that exactly what Cathcart Grant preached about the other night, only he wrapped it all up in a similar way? Some understood, some didn't, and yet he couldn't make it plainer than he did, could he? For the simplest things of the world almost always contain the greatest symbols."

They had reached the very edge of Cudham Woods, only separated from the broad highway by a high hedge, with here and there a gap, manufactured in the course of time by the village children for the sole purpose of clambouring through.

What particular reply Mr. Ayres might have made will never be known.

At that particular moment, the sound of heavy, dragging feet could be heard, shuffling along the country road.

Small clouds of dust, the direct result of those dragging feet, arose from the highway, and settled in white patches, blotting the hedgerow, with its wild roses, and thickly powdering their delicate starry beauty in a fashion which seemed to be quite unnecessary.

Then, from the highway outside, the silence of the woods was broken by a horrible twanging voice, talking as if to itself.

"Bones, bones, old clothes, old rubbish."

Then came a horrible cackling laugh, which had no mirth in it. "Old, old rubbish, ha, ha, ha; yes, nothing ever wasted."

Man and voice alike dragged down the high-road.

Mr. Ayres had heard the voice, and to his infinite disgust, had instantly recognized it.

He turned, to find Tinwhumpinny had dropped his bunch of wild flowers, saw with amazement that his eyes were wide with some strange horror, that his face had become deathly white.

Then, to Mr. Ayres' unutterable consternation, Tinwhumpinny suddenly flung himself down upon the ground, and sobbed as if his heart would break.

Mr. Ayres, who had never seen him shed a single tear in his life, was for a moment speechless from sheer amazement.

"Great heavens, Tinwhumpinny, what's the matter?"

For once there was no answer to his question, only the sound of Tinwhumpinny sobbing.

"Tinwhumps, who is this man, this—this—creature?"

No answer.

"Why has he got the power to upset you like this? Tinwhumpinny, I insist on your answering me. Who is he, Tinwhumps, do you hear me?"

"I don't know."

"Ask you, who is the creature?"

"I don't know."

"What has he got to do with you?"

"I don't know."

"Has he frightened you in some way?"

"Yes."

"I'll break his filthy, scarecrow neck for him," bellowed Mr. Ayres, "I'd run after him and do it now if it wasn't for leaving you here."

"Don't, don't leave me alone," said Tinwhumpinny.

"How often has the creature frightened you?"

"Twice."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"Where?"

"At the bungalow."

Mr. Ayres considered, perhaps after all it was only the remembrance of the tragedy at the bungalow, and not the man at all.

"Tinwhumps," said Mr. Ayres, soothingly, "get up and come home, no one can hurt you, or frighten you, while I am here; come on, Tinwhumps, come home, old man."

"Not until he has gone, oh no—no—not until he has gone."

"Why, Tinwhumps," said Aping-Ayres, unconscious of the fact that he was using the exact words that Martha Cray had once used, "why I have never seen you frightened of anything before."

"I am now, I'm frightened out of my life."

"Good heavens, yes, so I see, but what on earth about? surely you can tell me?"

"I can't, for I don't know."

"Tinwhumps," declared Mr. Ayres, "I shall really believe in a moment that you are sickening for something."

Tinwhumpinny rose from the grass, and stopped sobbing.

"Perhaps I am," he said, "the place is like a pestilence, take me away from it, Robbie, take me back to Church Street."

Mr. Ayres' eye-glass clinked down his waistcoat buttons, by reason of the abrupt way it had been dropped.

Aping-Ayres never remembered to have been so astonished in his life, and he was thinking deeply.

"Tinwhumpinny."

"Yes."

"There is something here I don't understand. Can you give me one single clue, any explanation which will enlighten me?"

"No."

"Is it that you can't, or that you won't?"

"I can't."

"You love the country?"

"Yes."

"And yet you want me to take you back to town, to Church Street?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me why?"

"Yes, all the beauty has gone. I'm—I'm afraid."

Mr. Ayres stood, thinking deeply for some time, he felt

himself to be face to face with some problem he was utterly unable to understand.

"All right, Tinwhumpinny, we'll pack up at once."

"Thank you, Robbie."

"Let us go home now, Tinwhumps, it's a long walk home, we shall be late for supper, old chap."

Tinwhumpinny glanced apprehensively down the high-road as they turned into it, it stretched in a long straight line in front of them, and nothing was now in sight, save the tall trees and the flapping rooks, chattering to one another in their nests overhead, as they possibly related to one another all the gossip of their own particular tree-topped village.

Once only, upon the road homewards, did Mr. Ayres break the unusual silence.

"I would give all I possess if I could understand," he exclaimed, "if I were only not completely in the dark."

"Don't you see I'm in the dark myself," said Tinwhumpinny, in a low voice.

"Yes," answered Aping-Ayres, "and it must be something very dark to have the power to make you cry like that; but, Tinwhumps, nothing shall touch or harm you whilst you are with me; I will keep, if I can, everything you are afraid of away from you."

"I know, Robbie, but nobody will ever have the power to keep some things away from me."

"Oh, Tinwhumps! *What, what* is it you fear?"

"I don't know."

Mr. Ayres said no more. He felt that was as far as he was ever likely to get, and the knowledge filled him with a strange disquietude, something intangible, and vague, and threatening, wholly foreign to his somewhat careless nature.

True to his word, Aping-Ayres determined to indulge what he believed to be only some strange childlike whim, and commenced to pack their things, to the consternation of the good landlady, who had become genuinely devoted to her two lodgers, and to whom Mr. Ayres offered no explanations, simply reassuring the worthy soul that it was nothing to do either with the rooms or her cooking, merely that he had stayed long enough in the country, and must now get back to town.

"Why, Master Tinwhumpinny," exclaimed the landlady, as she cleared away the supper things, "I do believe this is the first time ever since you have been here that you have not brought home any wild flowers."

"I left them all behind me in the wood," answered Tinwhumpinny.

If anything had been needed to convince Mr. Ayres that he was acting wisely in humouring Tinwhumpinny by taking him back to Church Street, and away from the place where a fear of no uncommon nature had suddenly taken possession of him, ample confirmation of his wisdom could have been found, when he awoke, very early, the following morning.

Tinwhumpinny lay curled up in blankets, supported by a pillow, in the middle of the floor of Mr. Ayres' bedroom, instead of being asleep in his own room next door.

"Tinwhumps," demanded Mr. Ayres, drowsily, "why don't you sleep in your own bed, like a Christian, instead of lying huddled up on the ground, like a Mohammedan."

"I wanted company," announced Tinwhumpinny.

"Confound it, he is still scared of something," thought Mr. Ayres.

"You're not angry, are you?"

"Angry, good gracious, no, when am I ever angry?"

"No, that's right," said Tinwhumpinny, "you never are."

"Why did you require company, as you call it, last night more than any other night you have been here?"

"I don't know."

"Humph," thought Mr. Ayres, "if he is going to get nerve storms like this, it is quite certain I must never leave him long alone by himself. I wish, in the name of Heaven, I knew what was the best thing to be done. I suppose I am doing all I can, but I am up against something or other now with which I haven't the vaguest notion how to deal. Damn it," concluded Aping-Ayres, "it's maddening, and I won't have beastly people upsetting him like this. He is always as good as gold, too," mused Mr. Ayres. "No, damn it," he added, "he's better, yes, jolly sight better than pure gold, anyway, I can lay claim to having discovered that much at any rate."

Whereupon Mr. Ayres, pleased with his own discovery,

promptly went to sleep, and continued so long in that state that they nearly missed the only morning train up to London.

Two people missed them sadly, and never ceased to hope for their return.

One was Cathcart Grant, who felt that some great thing had been taken away out of his life. The other was the landlady of the clematis-covered cottage, who, dear soul that she was, sometimes used to sigh whenever she made up a little white bed in the room under the eaves, and sometimes she would go up to the same small room and arrange some wild flowers she had gathered, and place them in a jug of water.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BLIND OF 107, CHURCH STREET, IS MENDED

UPON their arrival at 107, Church Street, Mrs. Wildgoose welcomed them with as near an approach to cordiality as she would ever be able to command in this world, whilst her face wreathed itself into an entirely new set of wrinkles, doubtless intended to do duty for a smile, upon viewing their well-fed appearance, and sun-burned faces.

With the watchfulness peculiar to her kind, Mrs. Wildgoose instinctively realized that affairs had taken a turn for the better with Mr. Ayres, and that, in all likelihood, her rent would not be in jeopardy for some time to come.

"Such a lot of letters for you, sir, since you have been away, and one came by special messenger, only a little while ago. The messenger said he had to wait for an answer, but, of course, I had to send him away."

Whilst Tinwhumpinny unpacked, Mr. Ayres perused the communication which had required an answer. He read the type-written document through several times, and appeared to be lost in thought.

It was a lengthy but most businesslike communication, offering him a lucrative position as special correspondent in Morocco for an English newspaper. The amazement of Ayres was not in any way lessened by the fact that the offer came from the very editor who had so abruptly dispensed with his services, upon the question of temperance, but a few months before.

Aping-Ayres little knew at the time that Cathcart Grant was the only nephew of the worthy editor, and favoured to

such an extent that the editor believed no one existed in the whole world who was his nephew's equal in any way, whether inside or outside ecclesiastical circles.

Nor did Ayres know that the young Vicar had written his uncle a letter, which had explained much, and which had asked a very great deal more.

"Robbie."

"Hullo, Tinwhumps."

"Are you going to study that letter all day long? Is it a bill? If so, it's a jolly big one."

"No, it's an offer."

"What sort of offer?"

Ayres made no immediate response; he walked, thoughtfully, up and down the room.

"Tinwhumps, would you like to go abroad?"

"Rather."

"To Morocco, for instance?"

"Oh, the wilds; I thought you meant the Continent."

"I've got an offer to go to Morocco, as special correspondent, for two years."

"Take it, Robbie."

"Yes; but I don't know yet that I could take you."

"Then don't take it."

Ayres laughed. "I think I could perhaps arrange that, Tinwhumps, as one of the conditions."

"Of course you could," agreed Tinwhumpinny. "I shall be attached as a sort of private secretary. But what an extraordinary place to send you; I shouldn't have thought they ever had any news."

"They give me a detailed list of the most remarkable things I shall take over with the post."

"What sort of things?"

"A big stone house, called El Gezireh, apparently a lot of land with it, and an immense garden."

"Well, the garden sounds ripping."

"Six mules."

"Any camels?"

"It doesn't mention camels. Any amount of goats, though, Tinwhumps."

"What ever for?"

"Milk."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, three servants, one a Moor, who has lived in El Gezireh boy and man all his life, and two Arabs, besides any other native servants I may require."

"Well, they seem to think you want an awful lot of waiting on, Robbie. Don't they give any money, or is it all mules, goats, and attendants?"

Ayres grinned. "Of course not. There is money, Tinwhumps; it's a handsome income for two years—more than we could ever spend."

"What are you going to do, Robbie?"

"I shall accept it, Tinwhumps."

"Let's look the place up in the map," said Tinwhumpinny, whilst he fished out a tattered and dust-covered volume from the bookshelf.

"I say, Robbie, we shall want a lot of things."

"That need not trouble me; they pay in a big sum to my account at the bank before I start."

"By Jove, Robbie, what an adventure."

"Yes," said Aping-Ayres, "it is rather sudden and startling."

"Your luck has turned, Robbie."

"Yes," mused Ayres, "but I wish it had been some other place; I don't think I know anything about Morocco."

"I don't think anybody *does*, Robbie; nobody ever seems to go there. But, of course, I have seen lots of pictures painted of the country. Don't you remember the famous artist who used to go to the Argaffels?"

"Which particular one?"

"The man who wore earrings. He lived in Morocco, among the Moors—for a long time, he told me so."

"So I should think, from his appearance," agreed Mr. Ayres.

"Anyway, his pictures were beautiful, and quite—what shall I call it—barbaric."

Mr. Ayres groaned. "I suspected something of the sort," he declared; "I suppose they are offering to send me out

because nobody else will go there. Anyway, I have to slip along and see the editor personally, at once."

Aping-Ayres departed forthwith, pondering in his mind, again and again, the strange turn that events had taken.

When he reappeared at Church Street, in time for tea, it was to inform Tinwhumpinny that everything was settled, and they would start for Morocco as soon as they could collect the necessary things, and get a reasonable quantity of tropical clothing.

"You see," explained Ayres, "the climate appears to be a sort of perpetual summer, with a minimum of rain, and the rest sun and scorching heat."

Tinwhumpinny proceeded to spread a portion of home-made Orpington jam, bestowed upon him as a parting gift, upon a reasonably thick piece of bread.

"If the sun there bakes us much browner than we are at present, Robbie, we shall be verging upon black. In the course of time we may even pass for two of the natives."

"How unpleasant," murmured Mr. Ayres, as he sipped his tea; "and, talking of the natives and their country, Tinwhumps, I believe few of them ever wash; insects of every unpleasant description swarm to make one's acquaintance without the slightest provocation; whilst the various stench, from what I can understand, are unutterable and unending. What shall we do, Tinwhumps?"

Tinwhumpinny continued to munch his bread and jam complacently.

"Put down on the list of things we have to get, Robbie, a large tin of Keatings and two of Sanitas."

"I never thought of that," said Mr. Ayres.

"It's better to be prepared," explained Tinwhumpinny, "and it will save you such a lot of grumbling when you get there."

The remaining weeks, during which Ayres made their preparations to depart, slipped by so quickly that he wondered afterwards how they could have passed so silently and unnoticed.

Eventually an evening came when the long tin cases were all fastened and ready. Tinwhumpinny's new white drill sailor

suits, this time made to measure, were stowed away quite scientifically with regard to space, side by side with the khaki suits and flannels which Ayres had chosen for himself as suitable to the climate of Morocco. They left out their Panama hats to wear upon the voyage.

Upon this last evening, after supper, Tinwhumpinny stood in front of the window, in his favourite position, and drummed the window-pane gently with one hand; now and then he would look rather wistfully round the room.

"What are you looking for, Tinwhumps?" Ayres asked carelessly.

"Nothing in particular, Robbie. We've been very happy here, haven't we?"

"Yes, Tinwhumps; but why are you looking at the room like that?"

"I was only having a last look round."

"A last look round, why, we are coming back here; I am keeping the rooms on. We shall both come back to them, Tinwhumps."

Tinwhumpinny made no reply; he continued to drum upon the window for some time. Then he produced a little wheel and a piece of white cord from his pocket, and, standing upon the shabby leather sofa, he mended the old refractory blind.

CHAPTER XXX

OLD CLOTHES

MANY weeks after Ayres and Tinwhumpinny had departed from Church Street, an urchin vendor of evening newspapers passed the door of No. 107 as he proceeded up the street, lustily yelling such details of news as he thought fit to repeat from the placard he carried in front of him.

One item of information he kept howling monotonously, "Death of the young Earl of Wellminster. Death of a young Earl."

At the end of the street he collided with a gaunt and disreputable individual, who cursed him heartily in a deep, twanging voice.

"Garn," retorted the urchin, "yer be damned yerself; why don't yer look where yer steering to, old bones and bottles?"

The gaunt, tattered creature, who had stopped for a moment to curse the youthful newsvendor, vouchsafed no further reply to these remarks, but straightway entered the dirty rag-and-bone shop, near the end of the street.

He stayed inside the unsavoury depository for bones, bottles, and rags, some little time, and asked a good many questions.

The proprietor of these articles appeared to realize he was dealing with a brother of his own calling, and, following him out to the door, looked down Church Street, and remarked—

"Why, yuss, I've seen a sort of kid wot you describe, a playing often up and down this street; 'corse I 'ave; lives at the little white 'ouse wiv' the tree in front of it. Aint seen 'im lately; fink 'e must 'ave gone away."

"Where?" inquired the sepulchral voice of the other old-clothes man.

"Lor lummey, 'ow should I know?"

The disreputable visitor asked no more questions, but ambled on down the street.

Reaching number 107, the tattered man knocked.

The scandalized Mrs. Wildgoose contrived to answer two of the questions that the wretched-looking man asked her, before she became overcome with repulsion, and slammed the door in his face.

Once more the creature cursed, as he turned away.

The man then proceeded to make his way into the Brompton Road, where he hailed an omnibus, apparently oblivious of the significant sniffs, and the universal unfolding of pocket-handkerchiefs which took place in his immediate vicinity, despite the fact that he had selected a seat upon the outside of the 'bus.

Reaching a central London thoroughfare, he descended, and entered a door, bearing outside, upon a brass plate, the inscription, "Messrs. Phillips & Brandt, Solicitors, Commissioners for Oaths, etc., etc."

The man passed into an outer office, where a shabby clerk sat writing, and asked for an interview.

By what particular process Messrs. Phillips & Brandt had managed to remain on the Law List, after a lifetime's practice of unquestionably shady transactions, no one will ever discover; it is therefore safe to assume that yet one more of the many perplexing legal mysteries which the gullible public perpetually swallow was satisfactorily being accomplished.

The nationality of these legal gentlemen, although Hebrew in part, was probably as mixed as their morals, so much so that it would, perhaps, have been a sheer impossibility to make any accurate guess as to the exact nature of either one or the other, whilst clearly discerning that both were undoubtedly of the very worst description.

Their greasy hands seemed to welcome their tattered visitor in quite a friendly manner.

Whilst their wretched-looking client talked, in as low a

pitch as was possible with his twanging voice, neither of the partners took their cunning eyes off their client's face.

They had all the appearance of vultures who had been startled in spite of themselves.

On and on droned the old-clothes man. At length he stopped.

Messrs. Phillips and Brandt breathlessly asked the man one question, simultaneously.

His answer was to produce a greasy, well-thumbed letter.

The vultures scanned it eagerly; they almost had the appearance of being about to devour it.

"There is a lot of money in it," answer the partners.

They always appeared to think and speak in unison, with the practised precision of an Amen.

"We make the terms?"

The old-clothes man gave vent to his mirthless, cackling laugh.

"And then?" he asked.

"You go to Morocco."

"And the money?"

"We find that. Our Mr. Brandt, Junior, will go with you."

The firm did not find it necessary to explain that there was an actual and urgent necessity for their Mr. Brandt, Junior, to get out of the country somewhere for a time, and that as speedily as possible. All they explained was the generous nature of their offer of his immediate services.

"You have a big thing," declared the partners in chorus; "a very big thing; start at once."

The man who had a big thing, and who was going to start at once, with the hopeful Mr. Brandt, Junior, as a companion, shuffled out of the shabby office stealthily. He had shuffled stealthily all his life, therefore throughout the entire proceedings in the office, and afterwards, he must have felt himself to be thoroughly at home.

BOOK IV
DAYS IN MOROCCO

CHAPTER XXXI

SOMETHING ABOUT PHARISEES AND A GLIMPSE OF A VULTURE

So far as Tinwhumpinny was concerned, the appointment in Morocco was a triumph, for from the moment of their landing, he appeared to regard the strange land and its people as a sort of brilliantly illuminated and barbaric fairy tale, arranged for his especial benefit, set to native music, with coloured backgrounds, worthy of Arthur Rackham and Dulac.

Ayres, having quite three weeks at his disposal before taking up his duties, made arrangements to see some of the coast towns.

So Tinwhumpinny stood and gasped with wonder.

Starting from the Grand Soko, in Tangier, that strangest of all the world's strange marts, he almost imagined, as they visited each ancient town in turn, that he was taking part in some bygone pageant, in Casablanca, Mazagan, Saffi, and Mogador, and laughed delightedly when, upon reaching the market-place of Mogador, he espied the strange, vertical swings, in which the native mothers of Mogador place their babies, sometimes for the entire day.

"Well, I must say," remarked Ayres, "that is the oddest nursing crèche I have ever seen."

The little brown mites, each tied to the automatically revolving swing with a brilliantly coloured scarf, squeaked shrilly, and opened their mouths greedily, like little magpies in a nest, for the sweets with which Tinwhumpinny fed them from a bag.

"I should have thought," remarked Ayres, "that all the doors of the East and West being simultaneously opened to

pour out their racial inhabitants, including cut-throat Moors, Berbers, Soudanese, to say nothing of coal-black, semi-naked Nubians, with rings in their noses, spears in their hands, and mounted upon camels, would have the effect of frightening these brown Moorish infants into convulsions."

"They seem to like them as much as they like my sweets," answered Tinwhumpinny; "why, they sit and crow at the strange crowd, and blink at them in quite a friendly way, don't they, Robbie?"

"Extraordinary!" said Ayres. "I am glad, Tinwhumps, I was not born in Mogador by any chance."

"I suppose you would have objected to the mixed nature of the company, Robbie?"

"Yes; and I should have flatly declined to pass my early infancy in one of those swings, and view this procession of the horrible representatives of every race daily."

"You would undoubtedly have been put there every day, Robbie, and nobody would have listened to your indignant remonstrances or have noticed your kicks."

"In that case," announced Mr. Ayres, solemnly, "I should have committed infant suicide by flinging myself from my particular swing when it reached its highest point."

"You would, unquestionably, have been a very difficult infant to bring up, Robbie. Look how angry all the babies are because the bag of sweets is gone. I believe they are cursing me because I haven't got any more."

"Yes," murmured Ayres, "I should imagine it is one of the few things their parents teach them, and really, considering the climate and the people, to say nothing of the entire absence of satisfactory sanitation, and the hourly monotony of those swings, they must often find it a really useful acquisition."

"Shall I buy them some more sweets, Robbie?"

"No, Tinwhumps; I should think you have given them quite enough for one day. We will go and look at the bazaar stalls—I can't call them shops—and see what we can buy and send home to Martha."

"I say, Robbie, wouldn't Martha be amazed if she could see the places we have seen?"

"I think," rejoined Ayres, "the funniest thing in the world would be to see Martha and Reginaldo trying to find the cleanest place to walk in, each hugging a big bottle of Eau de Cologne under their noses, trying to see the sights, and look pleased, at one and the same time."

Tinwhumpinny smiled. "How thoroughly upset Reginaldo would be, Robbie, when he found there were no sanitary authorities to receive his incessant complaints."

"Yes, Tinwhumps, and I have a conviction that the dear and worthy Martha would at once borrow a broom, and such vessels of water as she could procure, and proceed to thoroughly cleanse the market place."

"Judging from the look of all the places we've seen, Robbie, I should think it would be better to leave the entire streets and spaces of Morocco undisturbed, wouldn't you?"

"I should," heartily agreed Ayres, "any one misguided enough to stir up any of it would be fairly astonished at the maelstrom of typhoid, cholera, to say nothing of the other cheerful epidemics they would be instrumental in distributing around broadcast. It is an unfortunate fact, Tinwhumps, that nearly all of the picturesque creatures in the world, invariably survive wrapped in their own particular coverings of dirt."

"I suppose it is a sort of varnish for the picture, Robbie."

"Yes, and no likelihood of it ever coming off."

Among the more or less mixed class of people staying in the hotel at Mogador, were two rather common types of men.

They undoubtedly belonged to the not particularly educated lower English middle class. They appeared to have come out from England on business connected with a new mine.

As frequently happens with people who are common, they talked a very great deal, and very loudly, perpetually cracking silly and meaningless jokes, and tried by every means in their power, to replace a lack of any real intelligence or conversational power, by a display of jovial goodfellowship with all and any with whom they were not acquainted.

Some of the other people in the hotel tolerated them. Ayres

snubbed them, for Ayres could be very rude to people not of his acquaintance when he disliked them, whereas Tinwhumpinny, upon whom they tried an offensive form of chaff, quietly ignored them.

Tinwhumpinny had met a good many strange people hitherto, in his short life, but they had all been highly educated, belonging either exclusively to the greater aristocracy of art, or to the smaller social sphere of race.

These two men, although stupidly harmless enough in themselves, belonged solely to a class that he had never encountered.

These particular worthies, who, at their earthly baptism, had respectively received the names of Brown and Potter, regarded both Ayres and Tinwhumpinny with the ill-concealed amazement usually accompanying the ordinary mind.

Such chance scraps of conversation as they caught from time to time, immediately led them to jump to the erroneous conclusion that both Ayres and Tinwhumpinny were very exclusive, very stuck up and full of side, so promptly agreed that they, Brown and Potter, would, as they happily expressed it, soon take them both down a peg or two, and show them who was who.

Their first start in this direction was not singularly happy, for they selected Mr. Ayres by way of a preliminary experiment, and only met with disaster.

"Funny name, that of yours," observed Mr. Potter, one day at breakfast, in a manner he doubtless intended to be highly facetious. "Does it really mean what one might be led to understand from it?"

"Haven't the vaguest idea what *you* might be led to understand from anything," drawled Aping-Ayres. "First name is derived from an old term in falconry, if you know what that means, it signifies ap-wing, or up-wing."

"Really," replied Mr. Brown, with his meaningless and irritating laugh, which bore a strong resemblance to an animal neighing, "Really now, well, *we* never get any further than pigeon shooting."

"Let us trust you are more fortunate with your shots," coldly observed Ayres.

"I suppose you think no end of your family?" enquired Mr. Brown.

"Your surmise is incorrect," said Mr. Ayres, as he continued comfortably to consume his breakfast, "I never think of them, I happen to be sole remaining member of it."

"Ah," observed Mr. Potter, "some things don't bear even thinking about, do they?"

"Assuredly," said Ayres, "and the foremost of all the things you mention must be stupid impertinence."

Still undeterred, Mr. Potter struggled bravely on, assisted occasionally by Mr. Brown's neighing laugh and mostly inappropriate remarks.

"However, yours is not the only family, you know. Now, Brown and I can go back an awful way, can't we, Brown?"

"He! He! He! Yes," neighed Brown, "rather, why we can trace our descent right back to the ark."

"So I should have supposed, from your conversation," said Ayres, "and I imagine the number of couples shut up inside that institution must have turned out quite an amount of unremarkable progeny."

The man Potter became red with anger, he saw that he was being badly snubbed, and that, moreover, with a cool unconcern that only served to further enrage him. Finally, under cover of a conversation with his friend Mr. Brown, he attacked Tinwhumpinny, who was totally innocent of anything save a desire to eat his breakfast in peace.

"Humph!" thought Ayres, "well, their blood be upon their own heads, they will certainly get what they are asking for in a minute."

For some time Tinwhumpinny, occasionally chatting to Ayres, did not notice them, other people, however, at the table heard them, and began to fidget.

The others really thought that Messrs. Brown and Potter were making themselves very objectionable.

At length their remarks about boys in general, and their manners and upbringing in particular, became so pointed and offensive that Ayres, who was about to administer a few out-spoken remarks that the Messrs. Potter and Brown would have remembered all their lives, was saved the

trouble of doing so by Tinwhumpinny, who quietly solved the difficulty.

As Tinwhumpinny rose from the breakfast table, and folded his serviette, he turned to Ayres.

"Robbie," he said, "there are times in life when one longs to follow the example of Samson among the Philistines, but short of an actual vivisection on the spot upon either of the two people opposite, I lack his weapon."

Then Tinwhumpinny left the breakfast table, and went out of the room, whilst an audible, and not altogether undelighted titter went round the table, from the other people present.

Mr. Potter vainly endeavoured to cover his utter defeat.

"Precocious little brute!" blustered Mr. Potter, "I only wish I had the handling of him, I would teach him manners and education."

"With regard to education," said Ayres, with all the insolence he knew so well how to direct, "he is far in advance of anything either of you will ever be. With regard to manners, you are only competent to expound what you express, a living example of what to avoid."

"Ah! Bah!" snorted Mr. Potter, who, by this time, was purple in the face, but, saving the two graceful monosyllables recorded, otherwise speechless.

"Bah! Bah!" echoed Mr. Brown.

Ayres turned at the door, and smiled before departing, "I was puzzling over which one in particular of the animals you both reminded me of most. I have now discovered. It is the sheep."

"I think," observed a rather pleasant old gentleman, who was sitting at table, "it would be well to let both that gentleman and that boy alone; I do not think, sir, you will get any change out of either of them."

"I think," spluttered Mr. Brown, "you might have the goodness to mind your own business."

"I think," replied the old gentleman, courteously, "that might perhaps apply to more people present than myself."

Ayres and Tinwhumpinny sauntered through the old-world streets of Mogador, and threaded their way through the

bright, out-spread bazaar, admiring many things, and buying a few articles now and then.

"I suppose you have never encountered specimens belonging to that class before, Tinwhumps?"

"No," answered Tinwhumpinny, "and I don't seem to have missed much in being deprived of doing so."

"Yet they are representative of an enormously big majority."

"Are they?" asked Tinwhumpinny. "Well, Robbie, in that case I see, for the first time, the full and inner significance of the Pharisee's prayer."

Ayres laughed. "How, Tinwhumps?" he asked, curiously.

Tinwhumpinny pointed to a narrow Moorish archway, exactly in front of them. An old Moor knelt in front of the archway, all around him were piled boxes, one upon the other. Upon the biggest of the boxes he beat incessantly, whilst he whined out a sort of incantation from time to time. The particular box he devoted his attention to sounded very empty and hollow, but possibly the other ones all held merchandise of some description or other.

A pale-faced Oriental, of the Jewish persuasion, in gaberdine, viewed the kneeling Moor with contempt. He once endeavoured to pass the man, through the archway, but it was so belittered with the boxes all around that any such attempt was clearly seen to be impossible.

"That man, Robbie," said Tinwhumpinny, "is smothered in luggage; every single thing that any aunt or uncle, relation or guardian could burden him with to carry through life, has been given to him, and he is trying to carry them all at once, which is well-nigh impossible. He drums on that portmanteau incessantly, but the sound of it is not encouraging. He seems to be giving profound thanks for his own misery. Look at the calm contempt of the Oriental, who wants to get by, and cannot do so. Do you mean to tell me, Robbie, that the second man is not, at this actual moment, giving thanks that he is not as that other man is?"

"Oh, Tinwhumps, Tinwhumps," exclaimed Ayres, and sitting down upon a shawl-covered box, by one of the bazaar

stalls, he shouted with laughter. "Tinwhumps," he declared, between renewed gusts of merriment, "you will be the death of me, one day."

"Why?" demanded Tinwhumpinny.

"Broken blood-vessel through excessive hilarity," gasped Ayres. "Oh, Tinwhumps, you are the funniest thing I know."

Infinitely small as some of the trivial events of life are in themselves, actually at the time they happen, each little one may have its share in weaving, perhaps, a thread that may go on enlarging until it has become a mighty chain of circumstances, impossible to avoid, and hopeless to break.

It was so in the case of the small, yet breezy, interview just recorded, at the breakfast-table of the hotel in Mogador.

Many weeks after Ayres and Tinwhumpinny had left the place, and proceeded to their destination of El Gezireh, those two amiable worthies, Potter and Brown, continued to remain in Mogador upon business, for their start into the interior had been delayed.

They had just passed the curious upright wooden turn-over swings, where the babies were placed in the long market-place each morning, when Mr. Potter gave a surprised grunt.

Mr. Potter, who had been perusing an English newspaper, which was old and limp, as they must of a necessity be when they get to Morocco, addressed Mr. Brown. "No wonder that man, Aping-Ayres, and that boy, who stayed at the hotel, were stuck up."

"Of course they were stuck up," replied Mr. Brown, "but you haven't found that fact in that newspaper, have you?"

"No," answered Mr. Potter, "but I have found the reason of it. Do you know what the boy is?"

"Yes," replied the virtuous Mr. Brown, who had many reasons for remembering Tinwhumpinny, "I do, he is a precocious little beast."

"I don't mean that," retorted Mr. Potter, "he is the heir of the Earl of Wellminster, it says so in this paper, and, moreover, they are advertising for him."

"Get out!"

"He is."

"Why don't you say he is the Prince of Wales, at once?"

"Because he isn't the Prince of Wales," replied Mr. Potter, logically, "but, by Jove! he is almost next to it, so to speak, he is heir to one of the richest Earldoms in England. It says here, 'the late young Earl of Wellminster, one of England's premier peers.'"

"Here, let's look at the paper," commanded Mr. Brown. "Yes, that's his description right enough," he muttered, at length, "and they're advertising for him, too. But they call him Philip Gray here."

"Well, of course they do," said Mr. Potter, "that is his name."

"But I thought his name was Tin—something," objected Mr. Brown, who always liked to make certain of things.

"No, that was only the nickname that the other stuck-up fellow used to call him by."

"Well, but what's he doing here, in Morocco, anyway?"

"How the devil should I know," snapped Mr. Potter.

"Good Lord!" burst out the amiable Mr. Brown, "why it makes me sick to think that that kid is going to be the owner of money enough to—to buy half the blasted universe," groaned Mr. Brown, casting about for an unfortunate simile, "to think he will own a castle, and about five other great houses in the country, and a blooming palace in London, whilst we have to work like niggers for our bit."

"Hang it all, be reasonable," urged Mr. Potter.

"I can't be reasonable," confessed Mr. Brown, "why, he'll own a kingdom."

"Yes," said Mr. Potter, "that's about it, a kingdom."

"Damme if I think it's fair," shouted Mr. Brown, and crumpling up the offending newspaper in his hand, he stamped it underfoot, in the dirty market-place, as if to relieve his outraged feelings. "No, damme if I think it's fair."

"Well, anyway, we can't alter it, whether it's fair or not," argued Mr. Potter, "they both of them went up country, when

they left the hotel here, so I suppose they will have to start back again for England, and if the boy is an heir to an earldom, I wonder what on earth Ayres is."

"A blooming snob!" shouted the excited Mr. Brown. "Here, let's get back to the hotel, I feel I want a drink, after reading a thing like that."

As they moved away, neither Mr. Potter nor Mr. Brown observed a tall, statuesque-looking Moor stoop down in the dust and carefully pick up the English newspaper, which Mr. Brown had thrown away and trampled underfoot during the excess of his feelings.

The Moor had heard every word of their conversation. He could not read the English paper, but he nevertheless folded it and kept it.

The Moor stalked majestically down the market-place, and through the little, narrow streets turning out of it. The burnous he wore was richer, alike in texture and embroidery, than many of those worn by others he rubbed shoulders with in the narrow ways as he passed, but that was not the reason people drew away from him. Some of them would mutter his name as he went by. Al Aarasch, they would say. Al Aarasch had a suggestively sinister face, and it was evident that Al Aarasch was known and feared.

Al Aarasch stalked on, he looked neither to the right nor to the left; he appeared to be enwrapped in his own thoughts.

CHAPTER XXXII

EL GEZIREH

THE brown-skinned Arab mule runners, clad in garments of glittering and barbaric colours, streaming alike from their arms and waists, looked almost like strange tropical butterflies, as they sped beside the mules, urging them to their utmost pace by reason of divers Arabic encouragements, totally unintelligible to the unenlightened.

The rainy season had departed, leaving only as a reminder, acres upon acres, miles upon miles of wild purple-coloured iris, carpeting the brick-red soil wherever it was not interwoven with myriads of scarlet poppies, which almost looked like vivid splashes of newly spilled blood. Overhead, the sky burned blue, like a great sapphire held before a burning glass.

At the summit of a wild-flowered, sloping plain, the Arab runners abruptly pulled up the two mules, with a jingle of tiny bells and harness and a slithering clatter of hoofs, and pointed to what appeared to be a massive wall of white stone.

"El Gezireh," they declared, in their broken English, "the garrdin of El Gezireh, garrdin also, look, we am arrive."

Tinwhumpinny, with his eyes full of wonder at the beauty of the scene, caught Aping-Ayres' arm impulsively.

"Look, Robbie, look, why it is a Moorish castle, set upon a hill. Robbie, look at those white walls, the watch-tower and the cypress trees, it's—it's like something out of the Arabian Nights."

"Yes," answered Mr. Ayres, "rather too much so for my taste, one expects to see dragons come out to meet us, it certainly looks more like a fort than a house."

Upon alighting, they discovered that the enormously thick

fort-like wall was only an outer part, shutting in a wide courtyard, paved with cobble flints, marvellously mosaiced into the rich red, putty-like earth.

Yellow and brown wallflowers grew, seemingly, from the solid stone, brilliant purple bougainvillie burst in cascades over both stone porches and blue green shutters, more wallflowers burst out of the crinkled pink madder-coloured tiles which covered dozens of sloping roofs and gables.

In the centre of the courtyard, a wide stone seat, shaped like a ring, centuries old, held projecting hooks of ancient iron, wherewith to tether the mules.

They made their way slowly across to yet another big square courtyard, this time an interior of wonderful old cream-coloured Moorish tiles, with two blue-green borders, one upon the floor, another at the top of the high ceiling. In the very centre of the paved court, an old, shallow, blue marble pool glistened, containing gold-fish, which swam idly round and round in the blue-green water.

Here, three servants arrayed in colours which in every way seemed to match the old-world barbarity of the place, bowed low and greeted them.

They possessed, between them, a fair vocabulary of English, doubtless instilled into them with pain and toil by Mr. Ayres' predecessor.

The odd-looking household staff introduced themselves.

The head of the three, an old Moor, first greeted Mr. Ayres by removing his sandals and placing them before him; this curious observance was immediately followed by the two younger servants, who, despite their stalwart impassivity and muscular appearance, were mere youths.

"Master, I greet, I Hassan Ben."

"Oh," said Mr. Ayres, "so you are Hassan Ben, are you?"

Herewith Hassan Ben drew forward first one dusky companion, then the other, having the appearance of Egyptian Arabs.

"This Ahmed, good servant. This Azel el Azel, also good servant."

"Yes, yes, I am sure you are all good servants," said Mr. Ayres, as he smiled upon the three, simultaneously.

"We conduct over and round," vouchsafed Hassan Ben solemnly, as he prepared to lead the way, in much the same manner as a verger might prepare to show visitors over a cathedral.

"Yes," objected Mr. Ayres, "but how about something to eat and drink?"

"Yes, Excellency, after, prepared."

"Yes, Robbie, see this extraordinary place first," suggested Tinwhumpinny.

"I suppose we shall have to," sighed Mr. Ayres, "the old chap isn't waiting, we shall evidently have to follow him, and do as we are told."

Mr. Ayres carefully adjusting his eyeglass, surveyed, with something approaching dismay, the interior of a species of banqueting hall, mostly tiled, with dusky hanging strips of Moorish rugs stretched alike upon floor and walls, the only furniture in the place consisting of a long, ancient table, which might have done duty in the Ark, and a sort of Moorish throne chair, placed against the wall, two square oak stools, belonging to some unknown period, and a wicker-work lounge chair.

"Tinwhumps," remarked Mr. Ayres, "thank Heaven there happens to be one comfortable chair in the place. I bequeath the throne to you."

"I think," answered Tinwhumpinny, "from the look of them, it will be necessary to take turns, Robbie."

"In that case," announced Mr. Ayres, "I shall have to learn to make use of the floor. All very musty and decidedly mouldy," commented Ayres, after an inspection which was chiefly noticeable for an entire lack of enthusiasm, "and why have they adorned one of the walls of our future dining apartment with an ancient French drum? I presume it is for ornament."

"It doesn't appear to be for use," agreed Tinwhumpinny. "Look at the dust of ages upon it. I wonder how it found its way here, Robbie."

"Looted, I should say, like everything else in the place, Tinwhumps."

Tinwhumpinny looked at the drum curiously; it was

undoubtedly a beautiful old instrument in a perfect state of preservation, the heat had only served to stretch the mottled yellow parchment tighter, the painted coat of arms upon the barrel had faded into dull colours, but the name of the famous French regiment to which it had once belonged could be clearly distinguished.

"Suppose it was taken during battle, and not without bloodshed either," suggested Ayres, "look at the cords and the tabs, those marks upon them are old bloodstains. Very sinister," concluded Ayres, "and—er—quite unsuitable for an apartment where one partakes of food."

"I wonder," said Tinwhumpinny, "what its history can be; but I suppose, Robbie, the words of the Litany really describe its small brave life. 'Battle, murder, and sudden death.'"

"How unpleasant," murmured Ayres.

"Robbie."

"Yes, Tinwhumps."

"Why do people always pray not to have a *sudden* death, surely it is better than a lingering one, is it not? Have you noticed whenever the Litany is said in Church every one commences to wake up and take quite a hearty interest in the proceedings when it come to the 'sudden death' part?"

"Afraid I don't go often enough, Tinwhumps, to have made as many mental notes as you appear to have done."

"With regard to the drum, Tinwhumps, I consider it will be an excellent instrument for you to perform a tarantella upon every night before dinner without even the trouble of lifting it down."

"Right," agreed Tinwhumpinny, "also to be used in all cases of fire, panic, and distress, not to mention special occasions when I desire you to know that I am in a condition of great triumph."

The sleeping apartments, reached by means of a very narrow stone staircase let in the wall as if to take up the least possible room, were no less quaint. The walls were of blue-green plaster, very roughly frescoed in places, blue-green folding shutters, the only ornaments, covering most of the

walls, whilst the highly-coloured bed coverings, spread over the low squat beds were, according to Mr. Ayres, a work of art.

"What do you think of it all, Tinwhumps?"

"I think it's absolutely ripping, Robbie." And Tinwhumpinny invariably stuck to this opinion, despite any lack of European comforts they afterwards experienced.

"I don't want to see the servants' apartments," decided Mr. Ayres.

Hassan Ben, when he had grasped the meaning of this refusal, looked almost hurt.

"No, no," continued Mr. Ayres firmly, "neither do I wish to inspect the kitchens, because," he added *sotto voce* to Tinwhumpinny, "I feel, if I did, I should never eat a single thing whilst I was in the place."

Perhaps the greatest surprise of all came when they passed through one of the outer stone doors, with its iron gridded top, so suggestive of a prison, and entered the garden of El Gezireh.

In after years, the wonderful impression of that garden never left Aping-Ayres, it was one of those places which memory photographs for ever upon the brain. It was a thing of such sheer beauty that Tinwhumpinny absolutely held his breath and gasped.

Save for the size of some of the tropical flowers, it might have been one of the loveliest of English gardens, for many flowers which grew in England grew here in greater abundance.

Thousands of multi-coloured roses bloomed here, as they might have bloomed in some Persian King's palace. The perfume from the myriad stacks of these flowers, together with the mingled scent of countless spice herbs, was almost sufficiently heavy to intoxicate any stranger walking in their midst.

A wonderful old well, around which a patient donkey pulled a row of vessels strung together—manufactured of earthenware and covered in wickerwork—watered the garden and supplied the house.

A giant geranium tree, as big as some English oak, had

been trained into the shape of an arbour, with trellis-work doors, smothered in roses and flowered creepers.

The newcomers learned that all the meals they desired to take before night-time could be served here.

"Good idea," declared Aping-Ayres, "we will have one here now."

Hassan Ben hesitated.

"Good, meal—here—now—now at once," shouted Aping-Ayres.

Hassan Ben understood, and promptly disappeared with his attendants.

The arbour was carpeted with Moorish rugs, and Aping-Ayres sank upon one of the inevitable Moorish stools, whilst Tinwhumpinny occupied two of the other ones, at full length.

"Tinwhumps," asked Mr. Ayres, for the second time, "what on earth do you think of it all?"

"I think," said Tinwhumpinny thoughtfully, "it is like the Garden of Eden."

"I think," replied Mr. Ayres, "that it is like the pirate home of Lambro, Haidee's father; and I am not at all certain," added Mr. Ayres, "that it has *not* been a pirate's home at some time, it looks to me immensely like one."

"It is beautiful enough for the palace of a King," said Tinwhumpinny. "Oh, Robbie, I have never seen anything so wonderful as this; I do not want to see anything better in my life."

"Of course, Tinwhumps," observed Mr. Ayres, assuming an air of gentle remonstrance, whilst he lit a cigarette, "you have an inordinate sense of the beautiful, so of course this place appeals strongly to you; to my less susceptible senses, I confess, it appears barbaric, absolutely barbaric, and, great Heavens, now I come to consider it, I did not see any evidence of a bath anywhere."

Tinwhumpinny smiled. "Well, that can soon be remedied."

"How?"

"If," grinned Tinwhumpinny, "your worst suspicions are realized, and Hassan Ben, etc., etc., cannot produce one, you can at least turn the gold-fish out of theirs, and use the pool in the court-yard."

"Dreadful!" groaned Mr. Ayres, "I might be living in the days described in the Bible."

"Perhaps you would never have had one at all if you had lived in those days, for, you know, Robbie, there are only two public instances recorded of such a thing."

"Naaman?" ventured Mr. Ayres.

"Yes, and Bathsheba."

"Perhaps," suggested Mr. Ayres, thoughtfully, "if that lady had *not* taken her bath in quite such a conspicuous position, she might have saved a considerable amount of trouble to everybody around her."

"Most likely," rejoined Tinwhumpinny, "she was, in reality, just as little to blame as the countesses who once rode through Coventry."

"Tinwhumps," said Mr. Ayres, "you have a most illogical way of being logical, and your opinions are invariably odd."

Hassan Ben arrived at this juncture with his two companions, each brought some preliminary article in his hand, necessary to the making of a meal, and all looked as solemn as if they were performing a funeral rite.

Kicking off their slippers, before entering the arbour, as was their invariable custom, they produced a lighted brazier set in a tripod, a kettle, several open baskets of fruit and cakes, and commenced to put mint leaves and some spice in a Moorish pot before pouring boiling water over them.

Mr. Ayres stared in strong disapproval at this last rite, then he turned a horrified countenance upon Tinwhumpinny, and exclaimed, "Whatever happens, I decline to drink that filthy beverage."

Tinwhumpinny chuckled audibly. "You must, Robbie, they will be so offended if you decline."

"I cannot help it," said Mr. Ayres, "I do decline, phew! it's disgusting, the very smell of the stuff sickens me."

With every graceful elaboration, Hassan Ben handed a delicate cup, containing the afore-mentioned beverage to his new master, whilst Ahmed offered a similar cup to his little master, and Azel el Azel wat ched approvingly from behind the brazier.

From the grave way in which Hassan Ben smiled, much in the same way as a fond parent might do who intends to feed its offspring with some particular delicacy, it slowly dawned upon the disgusted Mr. Ayres that this was indeed a ceremonious and daily custom.

The expressions chasing each other over his face, as he took the cup, were a study to contemplate. Tinwhumpinny nearly laughed outright, but he came nobly and unexpectedly to the rescue.

With a broad smile, he first motioned the servants to withdraw. Then he pointed to the pot of mint tea, emitting most pungent odours, and speaking slowly to them, so that they could understand, Tinwhumpinny said, "In—England—we—nearly—always—take—this—in tiny—quantities—as as—a—liqueur. Go on, Robbie, sip a little."

Mr. Ayres, stifling his feelings and turning his head aside to hide a horrible grimace, obeyed, taking as little a measure as possible, which he surreptitiously conveyed again with all speed into his pocket-handkerchief.

Tinwhumpinny was braver, his face was as impassive as any Oriental's countenance, as he boldly drank off half of the cup offered to him, before handing it again to Hassan Ben.

"Thank you, thank you, Hassan Ben," said Tinwhumpinny, "and of an afternoon we always like coffee, so would you take this away."

"Coffee?" inquired Hassan Ben gravely. "No, coffee morning, coffee as also dinner."

"Yes, yes," said Tinwhumpinny, "and coffee as also tea."

"Coffee—Tea?" asked the perplexed Hassan Ben.

"No tea at all," urged Tinwhumpinny, with a friendly smile. "No tea. No, never."

"No tea, little master?"

"No, only coffee."

Hassan bowed and withdrew. Truly it was strange, but assuredly he, Hassan Ben, had but to serve, and to obey.

"I managed that very well, Robbie, don't you think?"

Mr. Ayres coughed up the remainder of the mint tea. "Tinwhumps," he said, "you are a treasure."

"Do you know, Robbie, I didn't find it so very bad; I

believe if I ever wanted a drink very badly, dying for one, so to speak, I could take it, and never notice it at all."

Did Aping-Ayres ever remember those words afterwards? Who knows. Yet they must have been recalled to his memory many and many a time in years to come.

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT THE END OF THE GARDEN OF EL GEZIREH

ALTHOUGH the meat at dinner that night consisted of cold corn beef, every other dish was exceptional.

The servants waited with the repose of statues, each stood against the wall, where the hanging Moorish rugs made a wonderful background.

Aping-Ayres and Tinwhumpinny sat in state, one at either end of the long Moorish table.

Only one strip of some bronze and scarlet embroidery covered the polished wooden surface of the table, which, otherwise, to Tinwhumpinny's delight, was piled high with masses of multi-coloured roses, in richly worked brass bowls.

As Mr. Ayres noticed the rich and curious designs of the flagons, which held the wine, he became more convinced than ever, as he confided to Tinwhumpinny, that the place had once belonged to a pirate, who had looted the entire lot. "Otherwise," declared Mr. Ayres, "I defy you to find such a collection of things, outside Wardour Street, in the far-distant London."

"Don't disparage our household Teraphim, Robbie."

Mr. Ayres grinned delightedly, in reality he was very pleased with his lot, and thought their lives had really fallen into quite comfortable places.

"By the way, Tinwhumps, you will have to drink either sherbet, or a specially fizzy form of bottled lemonade, for a whole year."

"Why, what is the matter with the water?"

"Oh no, Tinwhumps," said Ayres, as he shook his head

in a wise fashion. "If you drink water out in these parts you will get either cholera, or, worse still, elephantiasis."

Tinwhumpinny put down his knife and fork. "Robbie," he declared, with just the suspicion of a smile hovering over his face, "I sometimes believe you take surreptitious dips into a volume called the 'Pharmacopœia, for the sole purpose of finding out some horrible complaint to put me off my grub."

Aping-Ayres threw back his head, and laughed heartily, to the amazement of Hassan Ben, Ahmed, and Azel el Azel. Arabs never laugh at meals.

"Truly, the English are strange," thought Hassan Ben, "but assuredly they enjoy themselves, and it is a pleasure to serve them, for they are both of a good countenance."

Tinwhumpinny liked the sherbet, as he liked everything else in the land of the Arabs and Moors.

Hassan Ben was undoubtedly no common maker of sherbet, Tinwhumpinny declared, for he mixed all sorts of aromatic spices with it, which not only took the worst of the fizziness out of it, but made it taste of a dozen different things at once.

"It sounds like one of the worst of the American cocktails," commented Mr. Ayres.

"Try some, Robbie," urged Tinwhumpinny, as he thrust the still fizzing compound under the nose of Mr. Ayres.

"I should never be able to rid myself of the impression I was taking a form of either Eno's Fruit Salts or Effervescent Saline," objected Mr. Ayres.

"Nonsense, Robbie, drink some at once, and don't let your mind always meander in the direction of medicine."

Mr. Ayres partook of some of the beverage.

"Well?" asked Tinwhumpinny, anxiously.

"Really, Tinwhumps, it isn't at all bad."

"Of course it isn't; you don't suppose I should lap it up as I do if it was?"

Hassan Ben looked upon the scene, gravely, but approvingly. "It is well," thought Hassan Ben, "they pass the loving cup; it must be an English custom. They are satisfied with the things of my making." Poor Hassan Ben was always making silent deductions, but it may as well be at once recorded that these deductions were not invariably correct.

The roast fowl, set upon the dinner-table by way of a last course before the fruit, was excellent in every way, and even remarkable, by reason of a ring of skewered giblets, only partially cooked, and having somewhat the appearance of an array of miniature heads stuck upon pikes.

"Why, it looks like four-and-twenty blackbirds baked in pie," laughed Tinwhumpinny.

"Not baked," interpolated Mr. Ayres; "no, Tinwhumps, fear *not* quite baked."

Hassan Ben, seeing this delicacy was not partaken of, made yet another mental note.

"It must be contrary to their strange religion," thought Hassan Ben. "I must avoid erring again."

The thing, however, which delighted Tinwhumpinny more than anything else, was the quite imposing ceremony of making the coffee.

Strange and wonderful were the implements of shining beaten brass, with glass domes which swelled and bubbled. Wonderful the filigree Moorish cups, in which the coffee was served.

"Robbie, did you ever smell or taste anything so good?" exclaimed Tinwhumpinny, as he sipped the brown frothy compound, the fragrance of which permeated the room, doing battle for pre-eminence with the strong perfume from the roses.

"I never tasted anything better," replied Mr. Ayres, "I think we can safely reckon, Tinwhumps, that the commissariat is all right at any rate."

Hassan Ben, yearning to give every satisfaction, and mindful of the instructions given earlier in the day, entered at this point, bearing a Moorish jug filled with scalding mint tea, and two liqueur cups upon a brass tray.

Aping-Ayres exchanged a glance, indicative of utter hopelessness, across the table to Tinwhumpinny.

"What the master like as liqueur," quoth Hassan Ben, imperturbably.

"Thank you," said Mr. Ayres, "thank you, Hassan Ben, you can leave it." Then, upon the departure of the servants, Mr. Ayres added, "and that is precisely what I intend to do, leave it."

Tinwhumpinny chuckled. "We shall have to do one of two things, Robbie—either get used to it, or pour some of it away each evening."

"I think," observed Mr. Ayres, maliciously, "it would serve an admirable purpose if you took some every night by way of a digestive."

"Oh no, Robbie, don't be mean; I am not going to take the stuff unless I am absolutely compelled to do so, and, thanking you all the same, there is nothing wrong with my digestion."

"Humph," replied Mr. Ayres, "I trust we shall both be able to say the same thing after we have been inflicted with a year's cookery in Morocco."

After dinner they wandered to the very end of the garden, which was a considerable walk; they had not gone so far in the afternoon, and here another surprise awaited them.

They discovered the House of El Gezireh was indeed, as Tinwhumpinny had carelessly remarked, a castle set upon a hill, for, despite the fact that the front walls opened straight upon the summit of a sloping plain, there was a sheer drop over the great stone walls of sixty feet all round the garden, although the wall within the garden was only about four feet six high.

They gazed over to the depth below in amazement.

"Robbie, did you ever see anything like the wild flowers below?" exclaimed Tinwhumpinny.

The last burning rays of the sun flashed upon slopes where grew literally millions of scarlet and yellow poppies, and bright blue and violet iris.

As it lay beneath them, it looked like some mighty pall covered in jewels.

"I was thinking at the moment of something else," answered Aping-Ayres.

"What?"

"Why, simply this," exclaimed Aping-Ayres, "once close the big iron door in the great walls of the outer courtyard and the place is impregnable. I am more than ever convinced," concluded Mr. Ayres, "that this extraordinary place was especially built and contrived as the abiding place of

a pirate, and probably a particularly bloodthirsty one at that."

"It is beautiful enough to be the palace of a great king, Tinwhumpinny repeated for the second time that day.

"Tinwhumps, what an almost inordinate sense you possess of beauty."

"Isn't it, just all the world, Robbie?"

"All your world."

"And surely yours also."

"Yes, but not in such a degree; living here, I believe you will develop into a sort of miniature Eastern mystic," laughed Aping-Ayres; "oh, Tinwhumps, I therefore implore you not to imbibe the Eastern stoicism, even to the extent exhibited continually by our servants, so that I shall eventually have to employ a species of mental telepathy to arrive at what you are thinking about."

"You will always share my thoughts," said Tinwhumpinny.

"Yes, and very strange and curious some of your thoughts are," commented Mr. Ayres, as he sat upon the broad stone seat, let in the great wall, both still warm from the burning rays of the day's sun, and rolled himself a cigarette. "I sometimes think, Tinwhumps, in your own quaint way, you have given me enough new impressions to last me for this lifetime, at any rate, and after this lifetime who knows what happens?"

"Just the same, I expect, Robbie."

"How just the same?"

"Everything completely beautiful, don't you think?"

"Tinwhumps, do you know the word you both use, and I believe, live more than any other?"

"Beautiful?"

"Yes; is it because it means more to you than any other?"

"Yes, I expect so."

"It is perhaps the one word," mused Mr. Ayres, "that most completely expresses itself. There is one other word we both often use, which can imply everything, according to the way it is used, the word 'artist.'"

Tinwhumpinny nodded.

"Yet if you had to describe in one complete phrase all that is meant by that word, how difficult it would be."

"How would you express it?" asked Tinwhumpinny.

"I believe if I attempted to do so I should fail lamentably," confessed Mr. Ayres.

Tinwhumpinny was silent for some considerable time; from where he knelt upon the stone seat, he alternately watched the blue rings of smoke from Mr. Ayres' cigarette, wreathing themselves into fantastic shapes in the heavy air, and more often his eyes wandered into the jewelled depths of the flower-plain below.

"Adolph Zorowitch is a great artist, is he not, Robbie?"

"Unquestionably, one of the greatest."

"If one had to express him in a phrase," said Tinwhumpinny, hesitatingly, "it might be as one who could wring from art such secrets as were a tribute to his own personality."

Aping-Ayres stopped smoking, and regarded Tinwhumpinny thoughtfully. "By Jove, Tinwhumps," he said, "I should never have thought of that description, it is great, and like all great things, it is true. Whatever made you think of it?"

"Nobody knows, quite, where thoughts come from, Robbie."

"No," assented Mr. Ayres, "and nobody attempts even a surmise where they go to, but I have a half-formed suspicion that a very minute portion of the people of the world generate them, and the remainder are content to go using what others have provided for them for ever and ever afterwards, without even blushing when they give them out as their own manufacture. Caterpillars, Tinwhumps," continued Mr. Ayres, "caterpillars, perpetually feeding upon the green leaf, which doesn't in any way belong to them, until nothing remains but the skeleton of the leaf."

"The tree of knowledge must have had a good many leaves, Robbie."

"Yes," said Aping-Ayres; "and the only regrettable thing in connection with it is the fact that the earliest discoverers of its forbidden fruit were not immediately choked, before they effected a distribution of it to their fellow-explorers."

Tinwhumpinny laughed gleefully. "I think, Robbie," he said, "in that case the tree would have grown all one-sided."

Tinwhumpinny's face suddenly became serious, the laugh died away.

"Robbie, look—look at that!"

Tinwhumpinny pointed to the flowered plain below, where the long, blue evening shadows were stretching.

A long, deep shadow, made by the angles of the wall of Gezireh, lay upon the ground.

"Robbie," said Tinwhumpinny, in a low voice, "don't you see what it looks like?"

Mr. Ayres looked down. "Yes," he faltered; "it is like—like a cross."

"And the flowers all round it, Robbie! It is like a tomb and what a wonderful tomb, too."

Was some intangible spirit of prophesy in the air that night? was it only a passing illusion?

Whatever it was, Aping-Ayres felt a sudden choking sensation in his throat, the blood seemed to recede from his head and go to his heart, which began thumping at an absurd rate. A horrible sort of fascination seemed to glue his eyes to the spot, the distance below them seemed to grow dizzy, and wildly, unutterably hateful.

Aping-Ayres shivered.

"Come indoors, Tinwhumps," he said, and he was surprised to hear his voice was quite husky, as if it was an effort to speak. "Come indoors. What a horrible idea!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

A PLACE WHEREIN BOTH POETS AND ROBBERS MIGHT ABIDE

THE difficulty with regard to the morning bath was soon rectified by Mr. Ayres, assisted, doubtless, by the ingenuity of Tinwhumpinny.

Two big, shallow tubs, which had originally adorned separate corners of the inner court, and had contained some brilliantly flowering plants peculiar to the place, were scrubbed out and polished before being removed to the sleeping apartments, where to the servants' amazement, they were filled with cold well water every morning.

Hassan Ben gravely carried out all these directions, only permitting himself a silent consideration that the ways of the English were strange indeed. Yet, however strange the servants of El Gezireh might consider their new masters, there could be no doubt whatever, that from the moment of their coming, they were absolutely devoted to them, with that silent devotion which both Moors and Arabs know so well how to bestow.

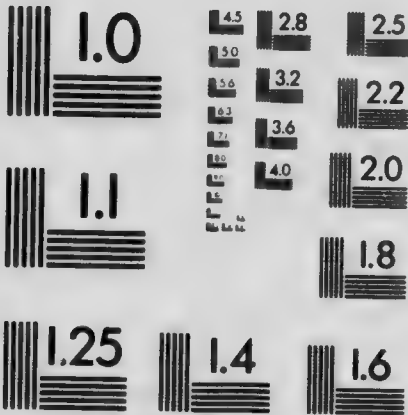
With regard to Ahmed, he simply worshipped his little master, and scarcely ever permitted him out of his sight. His dog-like devotion to Tinwhumpinny was almost comical, and Mr. Ayres noted it with satisfaction, for there were times and seasons when his work took him away for days at a stretch, and occupied much of his time, so that he could not always be with Tinwhumpinny.

It became a familiar sight, through all the countryside around, to see Tinwhumpinny in his white drill sailor suit, riding the white mule, which he had christened Mustapha.

Ahmed, mounted upon an equally sturdy brown mule,



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would always be in attendance, armed with a long stick, which he used vigorously for the purpose of keeping the common ones, as he described all other wayfarers, out of the path of his young master.

Upon one occasion, after the day's work was done, coffee had followed dinner, and a walk in the garden of Gezireh had succeeded as a natural consequence, Tinwhumpinny, who always recounted every incident during the day, rather startled Mr. Ayres.

"Robbie, Ahmed was so funny to-day."

"Yes, he is a quaint creature. What did he do?"

"Well, we came across a crowd of lepers."

Mr. Ayres shuddered. "God bless my soul!" he exclaimed, "I hope you did not go near them, Tinwhumps!"

"There was no fear of that," replied Tinwhumpinny, with a smile. "Ahmed beat them off with his stick. I have never seen him in such a rage. You see they came towards us and gathered round for alms."

"Ugh!" said Mr. Ayres; "it gives me the creeps to think of them."

"Robbie!"

"Yes."

"Once there was Someone who went amongst them, and must have often touched them, and healed them."

Mr. Ayres was silent. They were looking over the wall by the cypress trees. The great wall flung the very same shadow they had noticed before, and it lay there, down by the sixty-foot drop, but neither of them noticed it this particular evening, although it lay, black and ominous against the darkening waste of wild flowers.

Overhead, the sky was like a canopy of violet velvet, and the silver stars seemed to be looped in glittering spans interlaced, like the trailing fringe of some Eastern woman's shawl.

The stillness and the infinite poetry of the heavy-scene of Eastern night was all about them.

The closing roses offered their especial gift to the night incense. The Arabian herbs, together with musk and cinnamon and clove, added their little portion, whilst, faint enough

to be distinguishable, a scented geranium almost subtly suggesting an English garden, also offered up its widow's mite among the richer things around it.

In the distance, only the glimmer of a rounded Eastern dome grew white against the violet sky.

Tinwhumpinny broke the silence. "Robbie, it doesn't seem, living in this land, to be far away from those days, does it? Everything, everything seems the same. It must have been among exactly such scenes that the Poet Son of the King of Kings lived and walked. It has struck me ever since I have been in this land, and then again when I saw the lepers to-day."

"I suppose," admitted Mr. Ayres, "one Oriental city is very like another, and these places in Morocco seem to have remained exactly the same for the last two thousand years or more."

"But, Robbie, can't you feel what I mean?"

Mr. Ayres leaned his arms upon the broad stone wall and pondered. "I—I don't think I can, Tinwhumps."

"Not," asked Tinwhumpinny, "as if we were put back those thousand years and more, and that He might come here at any moment among us?"

"Tinwhumps," confessed Mr. Ayres, quietly, "I don't think that I have ever been very spiritual in my life and if I am beginning to understand things that are Holy any better, it is because—because——"

"Because what, Robbie?"

"Never mind now, Tinwhumps. Come, you small Eastern poet, tell me everything else that happened to you to-day."

"Well, first of all, the impressions I have been trying to describe."

"Yes, and what else? I suppose, as usual, you returned laden with wild flowers, so much so that Mustapha must have looked like an overladen market-carrier."

"Yes, didn't you notice how Ahmed and I had arranged them in the rooms, Robbie?"

"No," confessed Mr. Ayres, "but I shall later on."

"Well, then we met a rather horrible-looking Moor.

Ahmed called him Al Aarasch ; he looked at us in a most curious way, and I believe he followed us for a long time. I made out, from what Ahmed could tell me, that he hates all Europeans ; he has been in one or two insurrections to clear them all out of the country."

"Indeed," replied Mr. Ayres ; "well, I don't think that worthy's aspirations in that direction need trouble us."

"Ahmed hates him heartily," continued Tinwhumpinny "but there are other reasons for that. This man has been known to entrap people, and hold them for a heavy ransom. He has done this, Ahmed says, several times."

Aping-Ayres emitted a low whistle. "Oh, does he? Well, that is rather a different matter, and that reminds me of Tinwhumps, of something I have been meaning to talk to you about for some time, but somehow or other I have always put it off."

"You speak as if you were going to give me a warning about something, Robbie."

"I am, old chap."

Aping-Ayres lit a cigarette leisurely, and lounged easily against the now moonlight-flooded wall.

"Tinwhumps, this is rather a strange country, I heard curious rumours about it before I left England. These, more or less laughed at, because I thought them fairy tales. At times things here get dangerous, so I took good care to provide myself with two excellent revolvers. One I keep for myself, the other I am going to give to you. I shall give it to you to-night as soon as we go indoors. You are too sensible to fool about with it, but it might be useful in a case of sudden need. They are perfectly safe to carry fully loaded. Moreover, in a country where they apparently freely use knives, I think there is a need for the useful revolver."

Tinwhumpinny shook his head. "Robbie, I should never shoot anybody, whatever they did to me, you know that. It would be impossible to take a life."

"Humph ! Well, however much such a thing might interfere with your own principles, what would be your particular attitude towards anybody who, for the sake of argument, was potting at me ?"

"I should kill them, then," said Tinwhumpinny, earnestly.

"By Jove," thought Aping-Ayres, as they turned to go in, "and I believe he would, too; though I have never heard him express one single bloodthirsty wish before."

CHAPTER XXXV

ALL THROUGH THE DAY AND ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT

UNDOUBTEDLY one of the greatest delights of Tinwhumpinny life, was the manufacture of richly-scented powder spices and pastes, which, under the able direction of Hassa and Ben Ahmed and by means of native receipts, could be distilled from the flowers and herbs which grew in such profusion about the garden of El Gezireh.

Tinwhumpinny became most proficient in manufacturing these compounds. He sent powdered specimens of his newly-acquired craft, in brilliantly coloured native leather bags, to Martha in England, and even produced for the satisfaction of Ayres, a species of highly-perfumed green scented compound, presumably to brighten the process of Mr. Ayres' morning shaving operations.

It is true, Mr. Ayres had viewed the green-looking compound, which filled a Moorish jar, with something approaching a quite natural distrust.

"It looks horrid, Tinwhumps," he had remarked candidly.

"It's lovely," announced Tinwhumpinny, "you must smell it."

"It smells awfully strong, doesn't it?" ventured Mr. Ayres.

"Rather," agreed Tinwhumpinny, "once you use it you will never be able to get rid of the scent of it."

Ayres groaned. "What an affliction," he said, "to be afflicted about a pungent odour like that all day long, from which it is impossible to escape."

"Nonsense, Robbie, why it has got all the united smells and odours of Morocco in it."

"Heaven forbid!" burst out Ayres. "Really, Tinwhumps in that case I positively decline to use it."

"I mean all the most pleasant smelly ones," explained Tinwhumpinny, "it's like a mixture of attar of roses, sandalwood, morocco leather, and about ten other herbaceous ingredients."

"Not mint?" enquired Mr. Ayres, hastily.

"No, of course not. And last but not least, two oils, one of scented almond, and one of geranium."

"Humph!" said Ayres, "it seems to me I shall reek like an embalmed mummy."

"I call that jolly ungrateful of you, Robbie, I hoped you would have in the morning all the satisfied sensations of having just turned out of Bond Street—you know the place."

Ayres smiled. "Yes, I know the place, but I never went there. I didn't consider I could afford it."

"And now I am making a similar thing for you for nothing, you sniff at it."

"Afraid to do so any more," confessed Ayres, "it is so strong it might choke me. Anyway, Tinwhumps, I promise to use it."

"Of course you will use it," said Tinwhumpinny, "I consider it will be a nice fresh beginning for you each day."

"I suppose," proceeded Ayres, "you were responsible, Tinwhumps, for enlivening the atmosphere of the banqueting hall with those pungent powdered spices in open brass bowls, which caused me to sneeze through the whole of dinner last night?"

"Yes," said Tinwhumpinny, "I thought the place was old and musty, and wanted brightening up a bit."

"Perhaps you are right, Tinwhumps, and it may keep off moths," agreed Ayres, hopefully.

Tinwhumpinny regarded his friend quizzically, not to say almost scornfully.

"I should think, Robbie, that every moth who ever lived in Morocco has, at one time or the other, made its abiding place in that dining-room ever since it was built, and I leave you to guess when that event took place."

Ayres smiled delightedly. "It certainly is very musty and ancient," he admitted.

"And mildewed in patches, Robbie."

"Yes, I hope it isn't damp, Tinwhumps."

"And," concluded Tinwhumpinny, triumphantly, "it's undoubtedly brightened by my spices and flowers I put there for that sole purpose every day."

The only people that they could in any way claim as neighbours, were a Jewish merchant and his wife, who lived at the foot of the sloping plain stretching in front of El Gezireh, a little white Moorish house.

Ayres and Tinwhumpinny would frequently wander down the hill plain after dinner and spend the evening with the people, who were exceedingly nice, and always welcomed them most hospitably.

The merchant had lent them the chess-board with its quaintly-carved ivory chess-men, with which they beguiled many an evening at El Gezireh.

The books which Ayres, in return, lent the merchant, were considered by that amiable man among the treasures of his life, for the merchant was a highly intelligent man and fond of reading, and books were scarce in Morocco.

Late one evening, upon returning from the merchant's house, Tinwhumpinny suggested that they should sit up the few remaining hours and watch the dawn break over the plain from the watch-tower upon the roof.

Ayres agreed at once, it was far too hot to sleep, he declared.

The floor of the watch-tower was furnished with the inevitable strips of Moorish carpet, and square stools.

"Quaint creatures, aren't they?" commented Ayres. "Imagine even furnishing this ancient watch-tower."

"Well, you see," said Tinwhumpinny, "I am under the impression, Robbie, this is the particular place where Hassan Ben retires to say his prayers."

"Oh, is that it?" replied Ayres, as he smoked his cigarette contentedly. "I wonder what he prays for, Tinwhumps."

"Oh, I expect the same sort of things that we all do, Robbie."

"I wonder," mused Mr. Ayres, "if we are ever by any chance mentioned in his petitions?"

"I expect so," replied Tinwhumpinny; "you see he likes us both very much, I am sure; look at the care he takes of us."

"Yes," said Ayres, "he is a faithful old creature and he is really quite imposing as a chief butler. By way of a reward for his services, in the ancient days you are so fond of reconstructing, he would doubtless have been hanged."

Tinwhumpinny laughed. "No, Robbie, that happened to the chief baker, who in this case would be Ahmed, and although things do not seem to have advanced much in Morocco since those days, I am sure they have progressed sufficiently to preserve poor Ahmed from such an undeserved fate."

They stopped talking after a while, for slowly before them began to unfold the most wondrous sight in all Morocco, the dawn.

The bougainvillie violet of the sky was slowly changing before their eyes to a verdigris green, some of the stars still seemed to burn their twinkling apricot-coloured lights, whilst it appeared as if all the greater stars were being put out one by one: extinguished by some invisible hand. Bars of orange madder shot prismatic streaks of their startling colour right across what had now become a background of luminous jade green. Wonderful wisps of pink softly outstretched themselves, like wings across the heavens. It actually seemed as if giant flocks of flamingoes were hovering in flight.

The colours of orange dissolved into faintly liquid lemon hues before their wondering eyes, then the copperly greens changed into silvery blue, cobalt, azure, each deeper in its turn.

A cold rustle of air, which wandered by them as if it were fleeing away because it was lost, caused them to shiver slightly, whilst the first rays of the sun, not yet risen, outpoured a sheath of brilliant golden arrows, illuminating the distant stone wall of the merchant's house, and turning the flower-covered plain below them into myriads of jewelled earth-stars, rimmed with the diamond sparkle of the dew.

The Great Artist was painting upon the canvas of the

world one of the sublime pictures which every one can see and understand.

The Mighty Master of the universe was showing them that everything was good.

They lingered inside the old watch-tower absorbed in the picture, until the flame-coloured sun had stalked over the brow of the distant hill until the sky was one even colour, a deep sapphire.

They were upon the point of retiring to bed, whilst the air was yet cool; when Hassan Ben stood before them.

His face was grave. Hassan Ben, for the first time since they had lived in El Gezireh, had some bad news to impart.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE DANGER SIGNAL

SOME eight weeks, altogether, had gone by quite peacefully and uneventfully in the house of El Gezireh, ere Hassan Ben had imparted the first bad news, and before Aping-Ayres commenced to realize that all unwittingly he had walked into a trap and had taken Tinwhumpinny with him.

Not being, as yet, well acquainted with the signs and customs of the country, it was some considerable time before he fully realized that the trap was closing fast around them.

Like any other creature who is snared, he awoke to the unpleasant fact that the trap had shut fast, to find that there was no means of escape whatever. Busied upon his work for his paper, and occupied with the various reports he had to make and transmit, via the coast, to England, Ayres had not noted the trivial beginnings of one of those periodical outbursts, which occur from time to time in a country which hates the presence of all Europeans as deeply as it resents anything in the nature of changes making towards advancement or civilization.

The commencement of all the trouble had been ridiculously simple in proportion to the amount of bloodshed it eventually cost.

An Englishman, possibly ignorant of his offence, or at any rate, more adventurous than wise, had presumed to enter one of the many mosques, so sacred to the Mohammedan, dotted about the interior.

He had been promptly shot at sight. Six weeks afterwards,

his body, which had been quietly, not to say superficially buried without any commotion, was unearthed.

A hue and cry had been raised. People in authority, connected with the various consulates, had risen to administer punishment. Together with that punishment, various tribes had likewise risen, and the cry had gone forth: "Let us rise ourselves of these hated people." The tribes congregated, they came in swarms and masses, apparently from nowhere, as if by magic. Weapons they had in plenty and to spare, rifles and knives, ammunition there was no lack of. All these things were brought forth whenever the tightly-stretched goat-skins covering their native drums, sounded in the hills, and in the valleys, and even upon the coast.

That several Orientals, high in native power and authority and with money and resources at their command, were taking an active part in this uprising, could not for a moment be doubted.

The first actual warning ever given to Ayres, came from Hassan Ben; the second one, urgent and more definite still, from the house of the Jewish merchant, lying at the foot of the sloping plain immediately before the front of El Gezireh, which has already been referred to.

The Jew sent one of his servants to warn Aping-Ayres that there was a likelihood of immediate danger. He also told him that he himself had fled with his wife, to one of the safest of the coast towns, shutting up his house.

Past experience had probably taught the worthy merchant that his house and all it contained, would for a certainty be ransacked, and probably burned; consequently, having collected as many portable valuables as possible, he determined to take no risks.

Unfortunately the merchant's warning had reached Aping-Ayres too late, for mindful of Tinwhumpinny, he had ridden away, hard, upon the fastest mule at dawn, to communicate with the nearest consulate, and to send to his paper in England the first news England received of the uprising.

It was the last dispatch Aping-Ayres ever sent.

From the first moment he heard a whisper of danger, Aping-Ayres had not allowed Tinwhumpinny to move outside his

Gezireh, and the massive iron outer gate was always shut and barred.

Hassan Ben, who had hastily summoned four or five of his stalwart and swarthy kinsmen, as an additional guard, had been most reassuring upon the point of provisions, in the event of serious trouble taking place.

In his own quaint English, Hassan Ben had supplied the comforting information that there were enough goats and fowls in the back compound, and enough bananas and currants and vegetables growing in the garden of El Gezireh to last for three whole months. Then Hassan Ben had added, "And we have besides, much tinned meat."

Tinwhumpinny, unmindful as yet of the grave nature of the dangers that encompassed them, had given vent to a comical grimace.

"Wherever we go, Robbie," Tinwhumpinny declared, "we always, somehow, get back to tinned meat, don't we?"

In these early moments, neither Aping-Ayres or Tinwhumpinny fully realized the nature of the danger.

Neither were acquainted with the fact that fanatical Mohammedans, when aroused, can become absolutely diabolical and devilish, nor did they even faintly realize that these barbaric people could and would slay men, women and children, where they did not torture them, and regard such proceedings with a calm and oriental impassivity as a matter of little consequence.

Had the merchant's warning, which was the first real intimation of the position, reached Ayres one hour earlier, he would never have ridden out that morning.

Accustomed as Tinwhumpinny had become to Aping-Ayres being absent for several days at a time whilst engaged upon his work, it could not be wondered at that no suspicion of the real truth crossed his mind.

Tinwhumpinny was fully aware that things were happening, and were going to happen. He knew there was some especial reason for all of them being shut up inside the stone walls of El Gezireh, as if it were actually a prison.

He knew there must be some reason for the constant presence of Hassan Ben upon the small stone watch-tower set

upon the roof, with its close worked iron grid, that looked down over the sloping plain ; but Tinwhumpinny knew nothing of anything else.

The greater part of this particular and eventful day, Tinwhumpinny had passed in the great garden at the back of the Gezireh, where all was so very quiet that one might almost have supposed nothing ever happened in any way out of the ordinary in this drowsy, flowered-covered land.

A long letter to Martha, strangely enough only the second letter Tinwhumpinny had ever written in his life, had occupied some of the day. Reading, for here such books as they had brought with them were no longer interdicted by Aping-Ayr, helped to pass away the early evening.

A solitary dinner followed, with Hassan Ben, Ahmed and Azel el Azel, each attending upon their little master, and each successfully hiding their anxious countenances, despite the silent and significant looks they exchanged from time to time. Looks which, now and then, seemed to rest pityingly upon the solitary little figure sitting at the long Moorish table in his white sailor suit.

Then, whilst coffee was being served, there came a mighty clanging of the big bell at the gate, and a battering upon the stout iron door.

Tinwhumpinny jumped up from the table and ran, closely following Hassan Ben as he fled to the watch-tower.

Three dust-covered, blood-stained men were clamouring for admission.

They demanded to be let in whilst there was time. Their lives were cut off, they were pursued, they were flying for their lives.

They had fought as long as they could, the rest had fallen. Their ammunition had given out, they had only their swords left. Quick, now, open, whilst there is time.

Hassan Ben considered his orders.

"Let them in, of course," ordered Tinwhumpinny. "Robbers would, at once."

They all made across the courtyard, the servants opened the big barred door a tiny space, the three men simply slipped through, they were utterly exhausted.

Tinwhumpinny, always thoughtful for others in

emergency, had sped across the courtyard to the dining-room to get them something to drink.

In those moments, Hassan Ben had warned them, whatever they knew, not to speak before the child.

There was little likelihood of one of the three transgressing in this respect. He was a young French captain, who only knew a very few words of English.

The other two were Englishmen; one the secretary of a mine, the other, an engineer belonging to the same mine.

Aping-Ayres must have been taken prisoner, they informed Hassan Ben. "We expect he didn't have a chance to get away, for we were some way in front of him," they said.

Hassan Ben lifted up his hands in horror. "Say not this, I beseech you, before the little lord."

The Englishmen nodded gravely. "His boy?" they asked.

Hassan Ben answered, "He is the very light of his, my master's, eyes. Behold you, these doors would not keep him in, if he knew."

"We shall not tell him," said the engineer. "Poor little chap, Aping-Ayres will never get away, for they will do for him, the devils."

"Hush, here he comes."

So for a long, long time, Tinwhumpinny never knew.

Later that evening, events followed each other in rapid succession.

A great beating of the native drums, with the horrible hollow sound of terror they can strike, mingling with the curious mixture of a multitude of hoarse yells, forming in itself a demoniacal pandemonium, the waving of barbaric swords and long Arab guns, heralded the approach of a mob who might verily have been let loose from Hades, advancing amidst tattered coloured banners, tramping up the plain.

The army gathered before the house of El Gezireh and demanded that it should be opened to them.

Something between a smile and a sneer passed over the calm countenance of Hassan Ben, when, from the watch-tower, he listened to the demand.

Hassan Ben had not lived in El Gezireh, boy and man all

his life, without knowing they could never take it, could not burn it, were helpless to batter it in, and possessed no such things as ladders high enough to scale it, even could they have gained a hold in order to do so.

Aping-Ayres had never uttered a truer word in his life when he had carelessly remarked that El Gezireh was absolutely impregnable.

Perhaps the wild mob of fanatical Mohammedans outside as they broke up into groups and held hoarse councils of war, realizing this, thought it would be possible to starve them out.

The same thought was working in the calm mind of Hassan Ben, and yet again the mingled smile and the sadness came over his face. Hassan Ben knew they had enough provisions inside, for fully three months, and he knew help would come somehow before that time.

Two of the three strangers who had found shelter, and that none too soon, before the night was over had reasonably exchanged a look, that made them feel almost like guilty men.

Before Tinwhumpinny had gone to bed, he had said, "Thank God that dear Robbie got away safely this morning and reached the Consulate in time to warn them, and save everything. Of course, you know he is safe; you came from the same direction, and you would have heard directly, if you had not got through, wouldn't you?"

The engineer gulped. "Yes," he said, "we must have heard."

"Yes," repeated the mine secretary, dully. "We should have known."

"Thank God," said Tinwhumpinny, reverently; "I am glad"; and then he added generously, as he bid them good night, "I am also very glad that you three got here safely, you know."

The other two took the boy's hand, and said good-night, but they hung their heads.

The two Englishmen understood a smattering of French.

"Why," asked the young French officer, "do you look so downcast? The little one is brave; what troubles you?"

As well as they could, they explained to him.

When the young French officer at length understood, he shook his head :

"I think it is wrong," he said ; "I think he should know the truth, this little one, who loves him so."

"If we have promised, we must assuredly keep our word ; yet I think it is a great mistake, and some great harm may come of it."

"Is not the truth always best?"

The two Englishmen nodded ; they were sorely troubled, but believed they were acting for the best.

Once again the young officer endeavoured to explain. "I will myself go in search of Monsieur Ayres, as soon as I can get some kind of support. At present the odds are overwhelming ; it would be madness. We may even then be in time to save him ; and you will both join with me. Is it not so?"

"Yes," answered the secretary, taxing the little French he knew to the uttermost. "Yes, both of us, of course. I only hope we shall be in time," he added fervently.

The secretary's French was very bad, but his heart was good ; and somehow, since he had seen Tinwhumpinny, the probable fate of Aping-Ayres seemed to become horrible to him.

The French officer crossed the big dining apartment and looked curiously at the old and dingy coloured drum ; he probably realized much of its history, whilst guessing how it had come to be abandoned, and finally left to decorate the wall of a Moorish dining apartment. Slung against the Moorish tapestry it was mute and still now ; yet it must have sounded many a charge in the days long past.

The captain turned it over carefully ; he recognized the regiment it had once belonged to, and noted its perfect state of preservation. He spoke softly, as if he were addressing a friend who could hear his voice and would listen to him when he spoke.

"I would I could lead your regiment against these devils, and teach them a lesson they would never forget. I wish someone could sound your brave music again, my old friend."

CHAPTER XXXVII

BLOOD AND THE SWORD AND THE LEVER USED FOR A HORROR UNSPEAKABLE

UPON the morning of the day Aping-Ayres had left El Gezireh and ridden away, there were no outward signs of the storm which was gathering and about to burst, leaving along its devastating path massacre, bloodshed, and murder, as the bitter firstfruits of the biggest uprising Morocco has probably known since the ancient days, when the Moors first sacked the towns previous to making them powerful strongholds.

Everything in the surrounding country seemed just the same as usual, and, had anybody ventured to predict any of the wild horrors that happened before nightfall, they would have been regarded as romancers, who were drawing largely upon their imaginations for the sole purpose of intimidating the unsophisticated.

Fate was against Ayres from the very first, for in the ordinary way he would have taken the longer journey round to the coast, with his dispatches. Had he done so, he would have passed for a time completely beyond the danger zone. But although Ayres had not received the Jewish merchant's warning, he had received other vague warnings, and deemed it better to send a messenger he knew he could trust, who had worked for him upon many occasions and on whom he could fully rely. After this, Ayres intended to reach the French Consulate, and then return to El Gezireh.

The Moorish messenger watched Aping-Ayres' arrival with consternation, whilst he listened attentively to Ayres' instructions which he faithfully carried out; so that the

intimation that England, and Europe generally, had of the outbreak came from Ayres.

The Moor lost no time in explaining to Ayres that it would be impossible for him to return to El Gezireh. Ayres, mindful of Tinwhumpinny and determined at all costs to return and be upon the spot to defend his house in case of need, acquainted the Moor with his intention of returning instantly.

The Moor shook his head. "Impossible, Excellency; the countryside will be up before you have time to reach El Gezireh; journey with all speed to the coast, and you will be safe. I take the letter to the Consuls, for you would not get through, even now the way is already closed to you; but if you return whither you have come, you will be taken, and for a certainty be killed."

"I must return," Ayres had replied; "it is impossible for me to do anything else; the others left inside El Gezireh are under my care, and I shall certainly not leave them."

The Moor shrugged his shoulders with a gesture indicating the hopelessness of continuing any further argument.

"Besides," continued Ayres, "I have just ridden through the country; everything up to now is perfectly quiet, just the same as it is usually."

"The Excellency does not understand."

"Perhaps I don't," answered Ayres, "but there is only one thing left for me to do, anyway."

The Moor handed Ayres two letters, and some English newspapers several weeks old.

"These came for your Excellency, but, as a proof of what I say, I could not have delivered them to you, had you not come here."

"Why?"

"Even I should not be allowed to pass to you at El Gezireh."

Aping-Ayres stared at the Moor. "Why not, for goodness' sake?"

"Because, Excellency, the Europeans will be massacred, some in twos, some altogether in great numbers."

Aping-Ayres thought hard and rapidly, he was at last beginning to fully understand.

He thrust the papers and letters into an inner pocket of his khaki jacket, and remounted his mule.

"I carry out your orders, Excellency, every one, but yourself, farewell," uttered the Moor significantly, by way of parting.

Ayres rode as hard as it was possible to ride, tormenting his own thoughts, which he was trying, in vain, to arrange in some sort of sequence.

Could it be possible that a country, perfectly peaceful in all appearances, two days ago—no, not even so long ago—that—even quite quiet upon the early morning of that day, would suddenly rise in bloody barbarity, and massacre a lot of people who had never done them any harm?

Surely they must know that mad fanaticism like this would bring a heavy retribution upon them from all the Powers.

The words of the man whom he had met casually in the Haymarket at home, before Ayres had left England, returned to him with a grim significance.

"They are only beastly barbarians, at best," he had said, "if they get out of hand, they will murder and torture, kill men, women and children, with equal indifference, with an unexampled savagery."

"Great God!" uttered Ayres, "and I have brought Tir whumpinny out here to this!" and he spurred the mule, the animal was half mad.

One of the letters inside his pocket, he knew by the handwriting, was from Martha Cray. Her letters were the delight of himself and Tir whumpinny, and they always read them together.

What would Martha think, if she knew the truth, and the gathering horrors of the place to which they had come.

Imagination is often more terrible than reality, and the imagination of Aping-Ayres was running riot whilst he rode, and making havoc of his strung-up nerves.

On and on he went, the mule was going at a good pace, only about another two miles now, and he would be at the Gezireh. Then his heart sank within him, for the upland plain now in sight ahead, was swarming with armed men; and there was there.

For a second he drew rein, but he was already surrounded. From a little spur in the hill six men appeared, as if they had sprung out of the earth, and closed round him.

Ayres' hand went to his revolver, but before he could use it a long Arab gun had shot out from behind him, and knocked him upon the head, and he fell, stunned, across his mule.

They bound him tightly, hand and foot, and took him to the house from which the Jewish merchant had fled. The interior of the house was now a mixture of a filthy prison and a guard-room.

The men flung him, like a bundle, upon the paved floor of the inner court and left him there, still insensible.

Aping-Ayres never knew how many hours he remained in that state. He knew, from the signs and bustle and movement going on around him, that the main melhilla or army had moved away from the place.

Determined to starve out the few imprisoned inside El Gezireh, they had moved on to fresh places, where they could pillage and burn and slaughter.

Among the six men, who alone remained now to guard him, Ayres, when he had recovered consciousness, had no difficulty in recognizing the evil countenance of Al Aarasch.

Ayres had particularly requested Ahmed to point out to him the man who was in the habit of kidnapping people for ransom.

Al Aarasch had no need to follow the main army, he was powerful enough to follow only his own inclinations.

Ayres knew him at once.

The prisoner found himself wondering why they had not killed him at once.

He was soon to learn the reason.

A good many Arabs and Moors can speak English in a sort of phonetic fashion, without being able to actually write or understand a word of the written language.

Al Aarasch was one of these. He had not had nefarious dealings before with English people, without acquiring a little of their language, in which to express his sinister designs, and make them tolerably clearly understood.

Enlightenment was to come quickly enough, although shock froze the heart of Aping-Ayres.

"I have not killed you," said Al Aarasch, "you—white a Christian, a dog, bah! I spit on you all—yet I have killed you."

Aping-Ayres was silent, he could do nothing, he was bound hand and foot, he had nothing to say one way or the other yet.

"There is a reason." Here Al Aarasch slowly unfolded a very dirty and old copy of a well-known English newspaper.

Many a time had Ayres unfolded similar copies of the English paper, at Chelsea, at Orpington, dozens of times and dozens of places. He even found himself wondering what the familiar pages, which struck such an odd note in this land, such a place and at such a time, could contain that could possibly interest Al Aarasch, especially as he could not probably read English.

A dirty and very well thumbled paragraph had been roughly marked.

Al Aarasch pointed to it, with two of his brown, sinuous fingers, whilst he dug his black finger-nails into the paper from time to time to emphasize his points.

"There is a little English boy, shut up in El Gezireh," he said.

Aping-Ayres controlled himself with an effort.

"Far away, in England, they search everywhere for him; he is the inheritor of, what do you say, a kingdom, of great lands, of very great wealth."

Aping-Ayres' thoughts just then were running swiftly as fire through his brain. "Was the young Earl of Wellminster dead then? Was Tinwhumpinny being advertised for——?"

"They will pay a great ransom for him, to have him alive and well."

Aping-Ayres was still silent.

"He will do what you tell him, you will bring him here?"

Then Aping-Ayres spoke. "I will see you sizzling in hell first," he said.

"Sizzling?" queried Al Aarasch, softly, although the look upon his face was a particularly evil one.

"Yes," shouted Ayres, "burning, do you hear, burning in hell, before I bring him here."

Al Aarasch refolded the paper. "Another will burn first," he said.

Aping-Ayres gritted his teeth, for he knew now they were going to torture him if he did not consent.

It may have been at Chelsea, or it may have been at quiet little Orpington, seeming now so far away, that Aping-Ayres had first learned to address his Maker. His lips moved, whilst a wild prayer was silently uttered that he might have the strength to go through and die before he consented.

Al Aarasch sneered. "The Nazarene calls upon his God," he thought. "We will see if his God will help him greatly."

Yes, Al Aarasch, and all such as you, despite the written detractions of a few, and the professed unbelief of many, the pure tortured body of Him whom little Tinwhumpinny had called the Poet Son of the King of Kings, whose every wound has had the priceless power to uplift five continents for two thousand years, which has likewise the power to lift for ever all the cruelty, all the hideousness from the lives of women and little children, to protect them alike, with strong men, will have the power now to help this man whom you call a Nazarene and whom you despise because he is utterly at your mercy.

By the unutterable torture of the cross, by the deep-hammered nail-marks, and by the Holy crown of thorns will he be delivered, whatever you do to him.

The dear White Christ was ever the Friend of the helpless, and will abide with him, now and always.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ILLUMINATION

AT intervals, during the days of agony that followed they fed him with rough food, round his neck they sometimes slung a skin bladder bottle filled with cold mint tea, he drank it from time to time, and sometimes he dozed and awoke again almost directly to wonder where he was.

Occasionally the other five men went out, and he was left with Al Aarasch alone.

No syllable was exchanged between them, sometimes Al Aarasch in a fit of sullen rage, would cross over and kick him where he lay.

One early evening time, the men returned, dragging two whimpering creatures they had taken prisoners.

"Shoot them, and get them out of the way," Al Aarasch had commanded, "we have no use for them."

The creatures whined piteously for their lives.

One of them kept repeating in a frightened aimless way that his name was Brandt and that they must not kill him.

Ayres, half dozing, awoke to hear English words being whined out, and wondered feebly where he had heard one of the voices before. Now and again his senses would wander, yet he was sure they had brought in some one he knew. It could not be any of them from El Gezireh. None of them spoke English like that. They must be two stray European victims. Lucky wretches, he thought dully, they will only shoot them. Then he became unconscious again.

When Ayres next awoke, later in the evening, it was to hear again the sound of a voice he seemed somehow to

remember. He felt feebly, he couldn't turn round to see who it was, he wanted only to rest, just where he was.

The voice was reading, in English, something out of a newspaper. He could hear it all, it was the paragraph about Tinwhumpinny they were reading.

Of course, that was the reason he ... being kept here, and——

Suddenly the reading was interrupted, by a hoarse cackling laugh with a horrible twang in it.

Ayres was electrified into consciousness now, and he turned slowly round.

A Moorish lamp swung in the room, and by its light Ayres saw that Al Aarasch sat and watched two strange men intently. They were the prisoners his followers had brought in.

Despite the fact that one prisoner was dressed like any ragged Arab, Ayres was amazed to recognize the filthy rag-and-bone man he had last seen in England. The second man, with a marked Jewish countenance, Ayres had never seen before.

The old clothes man looked, if possible, more unutterably horrible than he had ever appeared.

Whilst Ayres stared and stared, wondering if after all his senses were not playing him some strange trick, the creature again laughed his mirthless cackling laugh; then the deep, twanging voice started to pour out words in a rush.

"Would you spare my life if I tell you a secret?"

"Will the secret bring a ransom?"

"Ha! ha! Yes, master, more than the other plan of yours."

"How?"

"Your way, they pay to bring him back. My way, they pay more, far more, never to see him again."

"How? I must have the English boy here before I can get the great sum of money for him," snarled Al Aarasch. "Bring him to me and you go free. Can you do that?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By reason of what I know."

"What do you know?"

"Everything I ought to. Enough to make the people in England pay you, as she paid me, to keep quiet. He has no right to those lands, nor that money, or that estate; he is not the heir of the Earl of Wellminster, he has never been, he never will be. They think he is the son of Philip Gray, he isn't. I am his father, and I can prove it, and bring him here."

Aping-Ayres, although bound, reeled to his feet.

"You damned liar!" he yelled.

The man started, he had not taken any notice of the prostrate figure, he had been too busy, begging for his own miserable life.

"So I meet you here, too, master. Well, seemingly, you are not so well off as I am, for I know something that will set me free, you don't."

"You damned liar!" repeated Aping-Ayres.

"It's the truth," said the wretched-looking man, "I knew it the night I first met him, knew it when I met you and the other, in the wood. She always knew it, and gave me money that night. Would you like to hear all the story of a woman sometimes insensible through drink, and a man, who came like a thief in the night?"

Once again Aping-Ayres spoke. "You have always come like a thief in the night, and gone like a thief, you are lying now, like a thief, and you will be shot, like a thief. Thank heaven for that at least."

"Not yet, master, not until I have told him that story, and I am going to tell him now."

"What!" the word escaped Aping-Ayres, like a shriek. This filthy creature would dare to tell Tinwhumpinny a story as vile and sordid as that; Tinwhumpinny, of all people in the world. "Al Aarasch! Al Aarasch!" implored Aping-Ayres as he moved stiffly towards his captor. "Do with me whatever you like, let me give you, now or afterwards, whatever money I have, but I ask you to shoot that creature, sooner than let him do what he threatens to do. If you will not shoot him, release my hands for one minute, and let me save you the trouble."

"Not so," answered Al Aarasch, "what he is going to

do, he will do for his life. If the boy does not return with him here, to me, this man will be shot."

A spasm of agony passed over the wan face of Aping-Ayres.

Al Aarasch was secretly delighted that at last he had made this stubborn Englishman feel something.

"Go," commanded Al Aarasch, "you say you are his father, tell him so, bring him here, here to me, a son should follow his own father, surely."

Aping-Ayres fell upon his knees, with a great cry. "Al Aarasch, I beg you, in the name of your God, if you have one, by the memory of your own son, if you have one, by the memory of your own mother—by the memory of everything you hold sacred in the world, not to let this man do this damned thing. Al Aarasch, do you hear me?"

"Will you bring him yourself?" asked Al Aarasch.

There was a long silence.

"Will you bring him?" again asked Al Aarasch.

"No,"

Al Aarasch gave a call, and two of the other men entered at once, in response to the cry.

"Follow that man," commanded Al Aarasch in Arabic, "he is to be conducted to the iron gate of El Gezireh, he asks there, through the grid, for the English boy, he speaks with him. If he does not bring the boy back with him, or if he attempts to escape, shoot him at once."

Tinwhumpinny was finishing his dinner, the silent Arab servants stood around, as usual; more than ever did they try by every means in their power to show their devotion to the lonely boy, who they knew was grieving for the long absence of his friend, although he was still innocent of the real truth.

The faithful Hassan Ben for ever upon the watch, proceeded to the gate, in response to the clamour of the bell, and cautiously negotiated through a chink in the grid, before even opening that portion.

Tinwhumpinny did not leave the table, something told him it was not Robbie returning, and he cared very little about anything else.

The horrible-looking creature, who gesticulated wildly,

implored him to open the door as he had to speak with the English boy, made no impression upon Hassan Ben, unless it was an unpleasant one.

Hassan Ben was firm, he declined to open the great iron door of El Gezireh an eighth of an inch.

The man whined and screamed and prayed that his life depended upon it; the boy's life depended upon it, he must speak with him, if only through the grid.

Hassan Ben was immovable.

"No one speaks with the little English lord," asserted Hassan Ben, "he is under my care. If you have a message to give write it, and I will deliver it," said poor Hassan Ben, ignorant of what he did, and thinking that no harm could in any way come to his beloved little charge, from a written message.

The desperate wretch, who was afraid that even the grid might be shut in his face, eventually seized this offer, as his last chance.

Ahmed passed out pen and ink and paper.

"Give me more writing paper," snarled the man. "It is a long message, a message of life and death."

Ahmed was completely ignorant of most of what the man was raving about, but Hassan Ben complied with the request.

Two men, standing outside some way off, held their long Arab guns in readiness.

The creature who claimed to be the father of Tinwhumpinny covered several sheets of paper; he wrote in feverish haste, but he wrote clearly, and it was a sufficiently horrible document for any one to read, let alone a child.

Hassan Ben conveyed the folded paper to Tinwhumpinny, who was eating his dessert.

Hassan Ben intimated that he had not seen fit to inform his little master before, for the good reason that he, Hassan Ben, always upon the watch, suspected a trap.

"Why, Hassan Ben," said Tinwhumpinny, reproachfully, "it might have been from Robbie—Mr. Ayres."

"No, no, little master," asserted Hassan Ben, decisively. "Not from the master; no, no, not his message; he would not send such a one as came with thi—"

Tinwhumpinny took the folded papers and read his own name, now so seldom used, outside—"Master Philip Gray."

"Why, how could this come here for me?" he asked. "Who can know my name in this land?"

"Hassan Ben, would you please move the swing lamp nearer; I cannot see to read this message, and it is a very long one."

Those who watched his face as he read remembered that they never saw him smile afterwards.

Suddenly the boy's hands beat the air helplessly once or twice, as if he were trying to beat away some evil thing, then he swayed, and before they could catch him he had fallen flat upon the tiled floor.

One hour passed, then two, whilst they tried every means in their power to bring him round. Tinwhumpinny did not regain consciousness for a very long time.

Knowing something evil had happened, but ignorant of its cause, the enraged Hassan Ben had slammed the iron grid, cursing the man who had brought the message, and threatening to kill him for making his young master ill.

The wretch, now beside himself with fear, begged the men, armed with their long Arab guns, to wait, only to wait until the English boy recovered. They waited silently, grim as death. One hour passed—it seemed an eternity—then two. Mad with fear, the man who was waiting for his miserable life, pealed the bell, and pealed it again. No answer. Then he broke into a wild, panic-stricken run across the sloping hill.

The men with the long guns missed him twice, although they fired. The third time, when he had reached the extreme spur of the hill, they hit him, and he tumbled down in a heap at the foot of one of the distant ridges, and did not rise again.

When Tinwhumpinny came to himself he avoided looking into the eyes of those watching him: for the first time in his life he turned his head away from them.

"Is there anything the little lord will like; anything his servants can do for him?"

"Yes, Hassan Ben, lock the—the—thing—the message away in Mr. Ayres' tin box upon his desk."

"Only that, little master?"

"Only that, Hassan Ben."

"Is our beloved little master still sick?"

"No."

"Is not the little lord sad of something?"

"Hassan Ben, don't call me a little lord again."

"But yet you are indeed our little lord."

"Hassan Ben, I—I—don't know who I am."

CHAPTER XXXIX

PREDESTINATION

ONE more day passed, and Aping-Ayres knew whatever had happened, Tih-humpinny must still be safe in El Gezireh.

Every moment through the long, agonizing night and day he had feared to see him brought in a prisoner.

Providence had in some way prevented this ; by what means he could not guess.

Towards evening a Moor had ridden up to the place, to warn Al Aarasch that a large force of French soldiers were clearing the country, and making their way towards them.

A few odd words, caught here and there, told Ayres this much ! the rest he had to guess.

Al Aarasch decided to hurry matters ; it was strange that with his remarkable cunning he had not thought of such a plan before.

The cowering prisoner, Brandt, frightened out of his life, and guessing the fate which had befallen his other companion, was brought before Al Aarasch.

"We have tried the Englishman, we have tried your companion ; one still refuses, the other has failed," said Al Aarasch. "We will now try the boy himself. You can write in English. Write."

The prisoner obeyed without a word.

Slowly Al Aarasch dictated a message, that the Master of El Gezireh was a prisoner, inside the house at the foot of the hillside before El Gezireh itself. He would be killed before sunrise, if the English boy—"What is his name?" broke off Al Aarasch.

"Philip Gray."

If the English boy, Philip Gray, did not immediately leave El Gezireh, and come to the house, alone, and without any one accompanying him.

Ayres knew only too well how hopeless any appeal would be. Nothing had any power to touch either of these creatures. He could only wildly hope the same Providence which had interfered before would do so again.

He did not fear death for himself, he welcomed the thought of it; but he did fear for Tinwhumpinny, and only Ayres knew how unutterably horrible were those fears.

Nothing they had done to him before compared with the agony he endured as the man departed.

The face of the man Brandt, as he prepared to obey his instructions, was stiffening into a sort of sallow and ghastly mask through fear, for the same two men accompanied him one upon either side, exactly as they had taken out his companion, who had never returned, and the fellow knew what their presence meant only too well, if he should fail.

"Wait for no questions," commanded Al Aarasch; "deliver this and return immediately."

Unfortunately Ahmed took the message through the small iron grid of the door of El Gezireh. He had seen them coming towards the place. Tinwhumpinny was walking about listlessly at the other side of the courtyard.

The watchful Hassan Ben was attending to some of his many duties within the house before retiring for the night.

After his last experience, Hassan Ben distrusted all messengers, and refused them.

A message to Ahmed, who justly considered they were besieged, was, before everything, a message, and it might be some sort of good news. But a message written in English was just as unintelligible to Ahmed as though it had been written in Greek or Hindustanee.

Tinwhumpinny took it from his hand and read the message. He knew the truth at last, and he marvelled that they only required so simple a thing of him.

All that day the servants had noticed that their young master's face was white and waxen-looking, his eyelids seen

to droop very heavily over his eyes. At one time during the day they had seen him take writing materials to the long Moorish table in the dining-room, and unfold one of the old English newspapers which had been brought up with other things to El Gezireh upon the same morning after Ayres had left the place.

They thought he was going to write a letter, and had wondered how he was going to send it at such a time; but after sitting thinking for a long time, with his head sunk in his hands, he seemed to have changed his mind, and had left the writing things untouched.

The servants had left them at the end of the table undisturbed when they had laid dinner that evening.

For the second time that day, Tinwhumpinny prepared to write a letter, and this time he wrote one.

He unfolded the old number of the English newspaper which was limp and yellow and faded by the heat. It contained the same paragraph as the paper Al Aarasch possessed, describing him as the heir to the wealth and to the estates of the Earl of Wellminster, and advertising for his whereabouts.

The paper also contained another paragraph, which stated that the next heir-at-law was Lieutenant Donald Ayrton, second cousin to the old Earl of Wellminster deceased, whose age was twenty-six, whose regiment was the 11th Hussars, whose town-house was in Eaton Square, whose country seat, Ayrton Towers, was in Somersetshire.

The paragraph concluded with a statement that Lieutenant Ayrton was well known in Society and in the hunting-field, was engaged to be married to the Lady Dorice Constance, and mentioned the famous London club to which he belonged.

Tinwhumpinny nodded his head slowly and thoughtfully, and wrote the third letter he had ever written in his life, and addressed it to: Lieutenant Ayrton, at the club mentioned in the newspaper.

Then Tinwhumpinny crossed the long room, and looked wistfully at the old French drum. He slipped it from the hook where it hung, all rusty as it was, with the drum sticks which were crossed to the side straps. Tinwhumpinny knew

only too well the value of a drum beat to command the attention of the ignorant.

Long afterwards, when England in common with the rest of Europe, had ceased to ring with horror at the happening in Morocco, a club servant one evening brought in a letter upon his salver into the smoking-room of a famous London club.

The smart-looking young Englishman, who took the letter indifferently, looked rather puzzled when he saw it was written in a childish handwriting. He was still more puzzled when he saw the heading, El Gezireh, Morocco; noted the date, not so old, and with increasing wonder read the words, starting quite abruptly--

"You may know who I am, although we have never met, although we are not really related at all.

"You are the real heir of Wellminster. I have never been the heir, never wanted to be; I never shall be, now.

"I am going out of the stronghold of El Gezireh to-night. I do not know to what, or if I shall ever return, but I want you to know the truth before I go, while I have the means to write.

"Yours,

"PHILIP GRAY."

"Philip Gray," muttered the young officer, "by Jove! that's the boy whom everybody searched for, high and low. He turned to one of the servants—"Call me a cab."

He gave a number in Cadogan Terrace.

He had hardly sat down in the elegant drawing-room, in which he had been shown, before a young girl, with a face beautiful and as spiritual as one of Danté Gabriel Rossetti's paintings, entered the room, and welcomed him.

"Why, Don, dear, what a surprise; I did not think you would be here to-night."

"Dorice, dear, read this." The young officer held up Tinwhumpinny's letter.

The Lady Dorice Constance read the lines, beneath

big shaded lamp; once, twice, three times she slowly read them through.

When she lifted her head, Ayrton saw there were tears in her beautiful eyes.

"Oh, Don, Don," she said, "this child, this boy, for he is only a boy, knew he was never coming back; can't you read between the lines? Oh, Don, dear, what happened to him, that night, for there has never been any more news of him?"

"No, dear, there has never been any news."

"Don, I am afraid he—he—oh, Don, and in that dreadful country."

"Poor little chap!" said Donald Ayrton in a low voice "poor little chap!"

"Don, there is something he wanted to tell you in this letter, what is it, Don?"

"I—I don't know."

"What could it have been, to make him write like that?"

"I don't know."

"Don, do you think he was all alone, in that dreadful place?"

"I don't know; I hope not; poor little chap."

BOOK V
NIGHT IN MOROCCO

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CHAPTER XL

DETERMINATION

SOME time later that same evening in El Gezireh, and no one could afterwards say how long it was, Hassan Ben and Azel el Azel, believing their young master had gone to bed, retired to their own apartments and slept soundly.

Ahmed, before joining them, was vainly endeavouring to quiet Mustapha, the white mule, tethered to the stone-ring in the outer courtyard, for a more or less prolonged inactivity had rendered Mustapha almost unmanageable, not to say cantankerous by day, and more especially by night. Ahmed, after most skilfully dodging the animal's kicking hoofs, turned to find his young master beside him.

Tinwhumpinny was dressed in one of his usual white sailor suits ; he wore no hat, and around his shoulders he had slung the old discoloured French drum, taken from the wall of the dining apartment, grasped in one hand were the two drumsticks belonging to it.

"Please, Ahmed, unbar the door," he said.

For a few minutes Ahmed was too startled to speak. At last he faltered, "Little master, I dare not ; no, no, not to be opened ever."

"Ahmed, unbar the door. I cannot reach the bars."

"Little master, I may not ; no, no, I may not."

"Ahmed, you know the walls of the garden of El Gezireh ?"

"Yes," faltered Ahmed.

"I go over the walls if you do not unbar the door and let me through this way."

"Little master," and Ahmed was nearly sobbing, "Let me call Hassan Ben."

"Call nobody; open that door, Ahmed."

"Little master, it is certain death."

"Who cares," said Tinwhumpinny, "open it, Ahmed, obey me." Tinwhumpinny's voice was low but very firm.

Ahmed, with white face and shaking hands, using every protestation he could think of, ultimately obeyed.

"Oh, little master, you will never return. Where go you?"

"To your master, Mr. Ayres; give me your torch."

"Little master, little master," entreated Ahmed piteously, "for the love of Allah."

But Tinwhumpinny did not heed. He had passed the gate of the stronghold of El Gezireh, a greater love than the love for Allah was drawing him down the hill slope.

The light of the torch flickered fitfully, the loud throbbing of a drum suddenly broke the complete stillness of the night around. The effect was startling in its abruptness, the loud hollow throbs of the drum sounded like an advancing challenge to battle.

If those asleep within El Gezireh heard it they paid no heed to the sound, they had heard too many drums and tomtoms lately for such an occurrence to have the effect of rousing them at night.

Ahmed was no coward, he did perhaps the only thing that was possible for him to do.

He mounted Mustapha as quickly as he could, and clanging the iron door of El Gezireh after him, hoping it might arouse the other inmates, clattered down the hillside after his young master.

CHAPTER LXI

THE UNKNOWN DESTINATION

AL AARASCH knew perfectly well that four European Powers, at the very least would, before long, bring a terrible retribution upon them all for the work of those weeks of uprising and massacre.

Al Aarasch laughed at the possibility, for he possessed retreats and strongholds in the hills, which nobody could reach; known only to himself and as many of his wretched followers with whom he cared to share the knowledge of his secret.

They might identify him in common with other leaders of the uprising and the massacre, but any or all of the Powers would have to catch him first.

Upon this point Al Aarasch felt very complacent. Yes, they would have to catch him first, and they would not find that an easy thing to do.

Notwithstanding this philosophical outlook, Al Aarasch was ill at ease for one reason; he knew he would have to be speedily upon the move, the warning that a French force was advancing must not be disregarded. If he could secure the English boy in time, and could hold him as security until any big sums of money he cared to demand would be paid, well and good. If he could not accomplish this he would have to abandon the scheme, for he fully realized that time was now the dictator, and time was getting very short.

Upon one point Al Aarasch had made up his mind, he would kill the Englishman Ayres, and with a nature wholly barbaric and diabolical, he resolved that the manner of

the death he would devise would be anything but a pleasant one.

The man Brandt, with his two guards, returned. Aping-Ayres hardly dared to raise his eyes to the door, he was fearful lest Tinwhumpinny might have accompanied them.

Then he remembered that the men had been told to return at once, to wait for no questions whatever.

"Surely, surely," thought Aping-Ayres, distractedly. "Hassan Ben, Ahmed, Azel el Azel, none of them will let him go."

"Well?" asked Al Aarasch, curtly.

"The message has been given, it was taken in," answered Brandt.

"He will come," said Al Aarasch, "there will be time to secure him before we go away."

Al Aarasch crossed to where Aping-Ayres lay bound. He kicked him, contemptuously, to be sure of his attention. "You will be killed, in any case."

Aping-Ayres made no reply, he had guessed only too surely that the wretch had intended to do so all along. He thought of Tinwhumpinny, and he felt in a dazed way that his cup of bitterness was full.

"A proof of your death will be of use," continued Al Aarasch, brutally, "it will make all those rich people pay more quickly to save the boy, they will not bargain, they will——"

Al Aarasch never said any more, at this moment the loud beating of a regimental drum sounded, sharp and startling and clear.

Al Aarasch knew it was a foreign sound and could not belong to any of his people.

Over his evil face came a sudden look of fear. "The French!" he cried.

Even before the words were out of his mouth, the men outside had rushed into the room.

With hoarse cries they shouted in Arabic, that the French were coming over the opposite hill, and some were mounted. The muffled thud of mules' hoofs could be heard clattering down the hard ground of the hillside.

Panic-stricken, Al Aarasch and the others rushed from the place, without a second's delay they were untethering their mules, two of them even left their long Arab guns behind them in the panic of their flight.

Aping-Ayres, although his arms were tied across, could just hold one of the guns with one of his hanging hands. He wriggled towards it and stood in front of the door, just in time to stop the man Brandt going through.

Brandt also had seen his chance, and was going to take it.

"Cut my hands before you go," commanded Aping-Ayres, hoarsely.

"No, you would kill me."

"I'll kill you if you don't! There's a knife lying there, cut me free, quick, otherwise my hand is on the trigger and I shall shoot."

"If I do, you will let me go?"

"You may go to the devil, afterwards."

Brandt did as he was bid, then he too, fled outside into the night. He escaped through the door first, for the arms and legs of Aping-Ayres were stiff; he could hardly move.

Slowly, like a child learning to walk, Aping-Ayres swayed and staggered, stumbled, and even fell once, at the very threshold of the door.

He reached it, he was out into the night, he was free.

Never, whilst he lived, did Aping-Ayres forget the first sight that his freedom gave to him.

Coming down the hillside towards him, was Tinwhumpinny, beating the old French drum he knew so well. A small lighted torch swayed and swirled in strange looped arabesques backwards and forwards as he beat.

Over the brow of the hill, above Tinwhumpinny, someone mounted upon a white mule was riding the animal full pace down the hill.

Disappearing over a ridge against the skyline to the left of them, were Al Aarasch and his party; and before they vanished from sight they turned, and deliberately fired a volley.

"Oh, dear God, not that, no, no!" shrieked Ayres, for suddenly the torch flickered and went out, the throbbing of the drum ceased, its brave music stopped, and three things fell.

The white mule at the top of the hill, with its rider went down, and a figure in a white sailor suit dropped at the same time.

Stumbling, panting, on, on went Aping-Ayres, he had broken now into a sort of shuffling run, his breath came in great hoarse sobs, would he ever reach him!

Yes, he is upon the ground beside him, he has him in his arms, although he cannot feel with them at all yet. Al Aarasch had taken care of that.

"Tinwhumps! Tinwhumps!" He holds him as a mother would hold her child.

"Robbie—at last!"

The man is murmuring broken words, he does not know what he says, he tries to lift the little figure, lying like a winged bird, he even makes a supreme effort to carry it home toward's the house of El Gezireh.

"Don't, Robbie! I—I can't move, I'm shot, hold me—as I am."

Tinwhumpinny's voice sounds with a hoarse kind of whistle in it, and the words came out slowly, chokingly, with the broken intervals between, when one is fighting for breath.

"Any—water—Robbie?"

Aping-Ayres blindly fumbles for the bladder of cold mint tea, slung round his neck and the boy drank some.

For ever and ever afterwards the pungent odour of mint always had the power to make Aping-Ayres turn sick and faint.

A great blotch, wet like wine and of its colour, was staining alike Tinwhumpinny's white suit, the trampled wild flowers around, also soaking into Aping-Ayres' dusty, shabby clothing as he held him

"What—have—they—done—to—your—hands——?"

"Nothing."

Tinwhumpinny did not answer, but he understood.

"Robbie—the paper—your box—will—tell—you—some thing—I—I—can't——"

"Tinwhumpinny, I know it all."

The eyes opened wide for a minute with some of their old, bright gladness.

"Tinwhumps, do you think I care? You are mine, mine more than ever you were! Oh, Tinwhumps, don't—don't—I can't part with you, I can't——"

"Yes. Hold—me—tight—like—that,—not—where—I'm—hurt."

In the effort to speak he drew Aping-Ayres' head down towards him. "Robbie, listen, there isn't much time. Thank you for caring, when I had no one. You have been all I've had, Robbie."

"Oh, Tinwhumps, don't, don't!" It was a cry of unspeakable agony.

"I can't come back to you, but you stay—and gather me a—bouquet of wild—flowers—you know, your thoughts—your works. Please, Robbie—when we meet—you'll—you'll show me them, and say, 'See—what I've brought you.'"

Then Tinwhumpinny lifted up his face to be kissed, and his head fell forward gently between Aping-Ayres' stiffened, outstretched arms.

Only the violet-coloured light was around them, and the spangled silvern stars seemed to almost touch the earth about them, like the trailing fringe of an Eastern woman's shawl.

* * * *

Watchman, O Night Watchman, what of the Night? O Great Night Watchman, what of the child?

O Watchman, is he now entering one of the jewelled gates he knew so well, to abide in his Heavenly Father's Kingdom for ever and ever more?

O Great, Great Night Watchman, what of the man? The tortured, broken-hearted man? What of him, O Night Watchman?

See, the light of reason has left his eyes.

O Night Watchman, what of the two vultures coming from the hill yonder, who slowly circle round and bear down upon them?

Great Night Watchman, give the man strength to fight them off.

Great Night Watchman, see the wild flowers he loved well are trampled under foot, and are all drooping, yes drooping, for they are covered with his blood.

Why, Great Night Watchman, there is no longer any Night. See, it is Day already, and see, there is no longer any blood, for the sweet early dew has washed it all away.

O Great Night Watchman, if you depart when it becomes day, canno you hear our cry? And if you hear, can you not answer? And if you will not answer, do you not understand?

* * * * *

The men who found them understood. They found a wild-faced man, all blood-stained, clasping the dead boy to him in his arms. The light of reason had left his eyes for a long time being, they were burning bright with the light of madness.

With a long Arab gun he beat wildly about above his head where, high up, two vultures hovered, threatening to swoop down upon them.

With shrill inarticulate curses, he defied the evil things, and only stopped to hug the small dead body closer to him.

Hassan Ben understood only too well.

"Separate the dead child from him very gently," commanded Hassan Ben, in Arabic, "for, behold, the little child's light was even as the light of our master's eyes. Carry him away also into the house, he is not greatly hurt."

They buried him beside the wall of the garden of El Gezireh, where the wild flowers would grow around him for ever.

They wrapped him in the costly garment of an Arab King. It was a silken robe of bright vermilion and azure blue, with a purple fringe; it had been a royal covering.

They placed some of the sweet spices, he had gathered for himself often in this his last resting-place.

They put no cross there, for every evening the sun threw the shadow of the great stone wall of El Gezireh upon the ground where the wild flowers grew most plentifully, and the deep shadow was itself a cross.

None of the Arabs knew how to spell his name. So, the

the great Moorish wall, they carved the letter "T," and added, in their simple ignorance of English, " Butt ove fourtin summr." But of fourteen summers. The gipsy woman was right it was only a little life.

Aping-Ayres was right, for he had said truthfully, " Lady Derry, if they ever live to grow up."

Tinwhumpinny had been right.

"Why, Robbie, it is like a tomb, and what a wonderful tomb, too."

The man whose tortured brain and body were fighting in the throes of brain-fever, knew nothing of these things.

Week followed week, he was actually conscious of nothing around him.

When the relief party had come, and the rebellion had subsided, they had searched among his papers, and had sent for Martha Cray.

Dear angel woman that she ever was, she had answered that call directly, and at once started upon a journey, that seemed to be taking her to the other end of the earth.

The man never recognized her, never knew that she had arrived.

Martha must have understood in those long watches, something of a great, great love. Night after night the broken words and answers would be the same, sometimes a prayer was added; but the muttering always continued:

"Is that original? If so, it's very clever. God! yes, I'll give him a home. Oh, Tinwhumps, Tinwhumps, you little Bohemian! Dear God, I never learned how to pray, but give me enough money to buy him food; we haven't got any now, and I'm trying hard to lead a different life. Yes, yes, yes, of course, he brings wild flowers wherever he goes. Yes, yes, yes, and poetry, too, he is an artist to his finger tips. No, no, Tinwhumps, all books are taboo for you, you know. Ha, ha, ha, you don't mind that as long as I talk. Oh, but, Tinwhumps, I cannot talk to a child the way a child ought to be talked to, you know. Oh, God, please hear me and teach me exactly what I ought to do for him for the best. Ugh—a cross, come indoors, Tinwhumps, a tomb? What a horrible idea, come indoors. I tell you I will sizzle in hell before I bring

him here! Oh, God, give me strength to bear it—or—or—kill me—Ah——”

“Please give him something,” Martha would pleadingly beg of the doctor, with tears running down her cheeks.

More long weeks of incoherence, then, very slowly, memory coming back; then, most terrible of all, a settled melancholy and a great longing to die.

Days would pass, and the wreck of what had once been young, strong man would utter no single syllable, no word would ask for nothing, would touch nothing.

He was fed as a little child is fed.

To the honour of Martha Cray be it said how she found way to save the man who wanted to die before his work was done.

A young writer, who was beginning to make a name in Europe, chanced to be travelling through a part of Morocco for a holiday trip, now that the country was again in a peaceable state.

Hearing that Aping-Ayres was said to be recovering, determined to journey a little out of his way, and call enquire after him.

It was Martha Cray who saw him. Martha Cray who told this stranger, who looked to Martha almost a boy himself, the whole story of Tinwhumpinny. Martha it was who begged him, when she saw the tears of sympathy in his eyes, to live and rouse Aping-Ayres to life and to duty.

The young writer thought for a long time. “There is nothing I could do,” he said, “I could talk to him about Tinwhumpinny, and persuade him to write his life. It will cure him or cure him; anyway, the doctors say he will die if he is not aroused, do they not?”

“Yes, sir. Oh, God bless you!” said Martha. “Will you try?”

“Yes,” said the writer, “take me to his room.”

“Can I smoke a cigarette there?”

“Yes, sir, now.”

“I shall have smoked a good many before I gain my purpose. Whatever you do, see that we are not interrupted, do not let any one come into the room for any reason whatever.”

Twelve hours afterwards, the young writer came out of the room. He shook Martha gently to wake her; in the long time of waiting she had fallen asleep.

The writer looked like a man who had grown mentally and physically tired, but he smiled as a man who has conquered. "He will live," he said, "I am to write his life, from such things as he has told me. He will get well, and he will return to England with us, and conquer. Look." He placed a piece of paper in Martha's hand, upon it was written, in Aping-Ayres' handwriting:—

I, Robert Aping-Ayres, some time known as Roberto or Robbie, have left to wiser and maybe more careful hands than my own the chronicling of the little life lent to me from God to take care of for a while before He took it again unto Himself. When whimsically I christened you "Tinwhumpinny" I little dreamed that the sound of the drum you would beat would recall me from the path down which I was fast drifting I know not whither. If I have failed in remembering your sayings and doings it is only because they cannot be chronicled. If I have stumbled and faltered in showing the depth and purity of the childish love which saved in time a wasted life which the locusts were eating, it is only because that love is above all price, beyond all power to describe.

But, in the words I remember so well, I live for the time when before one of the jewelled Gates of Heaven he will beat his drum to guide me in also, and I shall bring the bouquet of wild flowers he bade me gather for him, with the words, "See what I've brought you." And maybe they will become immortal flowers to bloom beside us in the Garden of the Kingdom of Heaven for ever and ever, Amen.

THE END